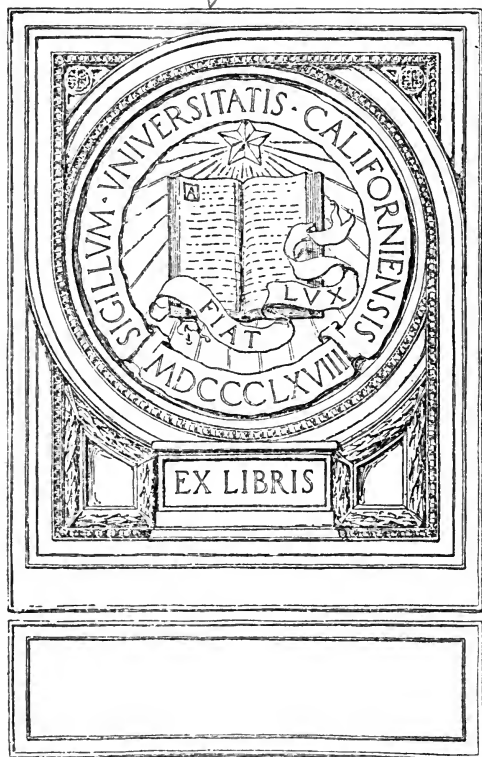


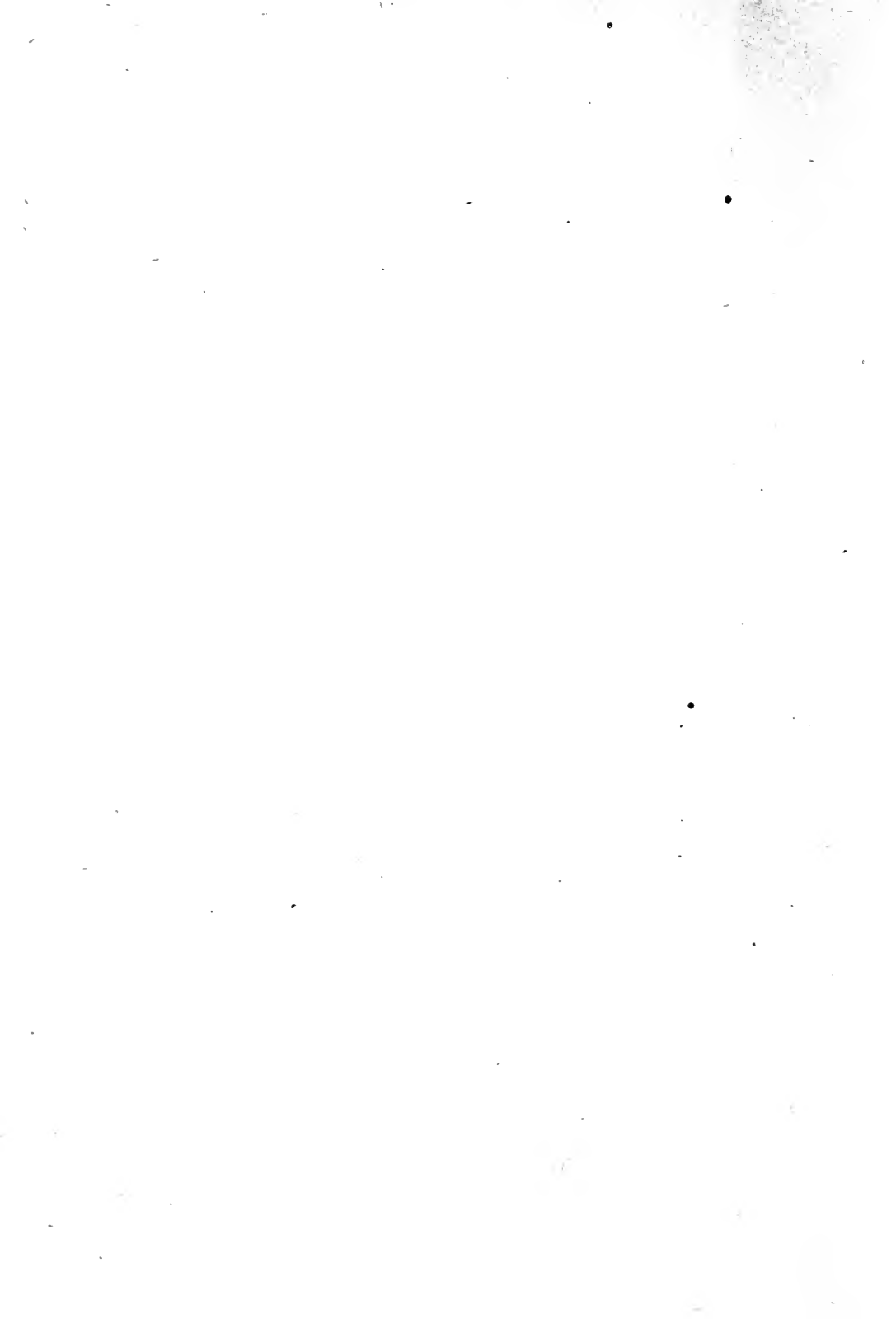
THE ITALIAN LAKES

PAINTED BY ELLA DU CANE

DESCRIBED BY RICHARD BAGOT







THE ITALIAN LAKES

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR

BELGIUM
FLORENCE AND SOME
TUSCAN CITIES
NAPLES
ROME
SICILY
VENICE
WORLD PICTURES

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A GARDEN AT CADENABBIA, LAGO DI COMO

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THE ITALIAN LAKES
PAINTED BY ELLA
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SOHO SQUARE · LONDON



TO WHOM
IT MAY COME

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Published November 1905
Reprinted in 1908 and 1912

C. E. P.

Preface

IN giving the title—*The Italian Lakes*—to the present volume, some apology is due to those who turn over the following pages. It has been deemed advisable, however, only to include those lakes in Northern Italy to which foreign visitors most easily wend their way, and the compilers of this book much regret that it has been found impossible to include the Lago di Garda—considered by many to be the finest, as it is the largest, of the Italian Lakes, and the Lago di Varese, which also has its votaries. The beautiful and historic lakes of Trasimene, Bolsena, and others in Central Italy, the lakes of Albano, Nemi, Bracciano, and many less well-known localities, should undoubtedly find a place in a volume bearing a title so comprehensive as that of *The Italian Lakes*.

Limitation of space will, it is hoped, be accepted as an excuse for omissions which the critical reader who is also a lover of Italy might otherwise have just reason to resent.

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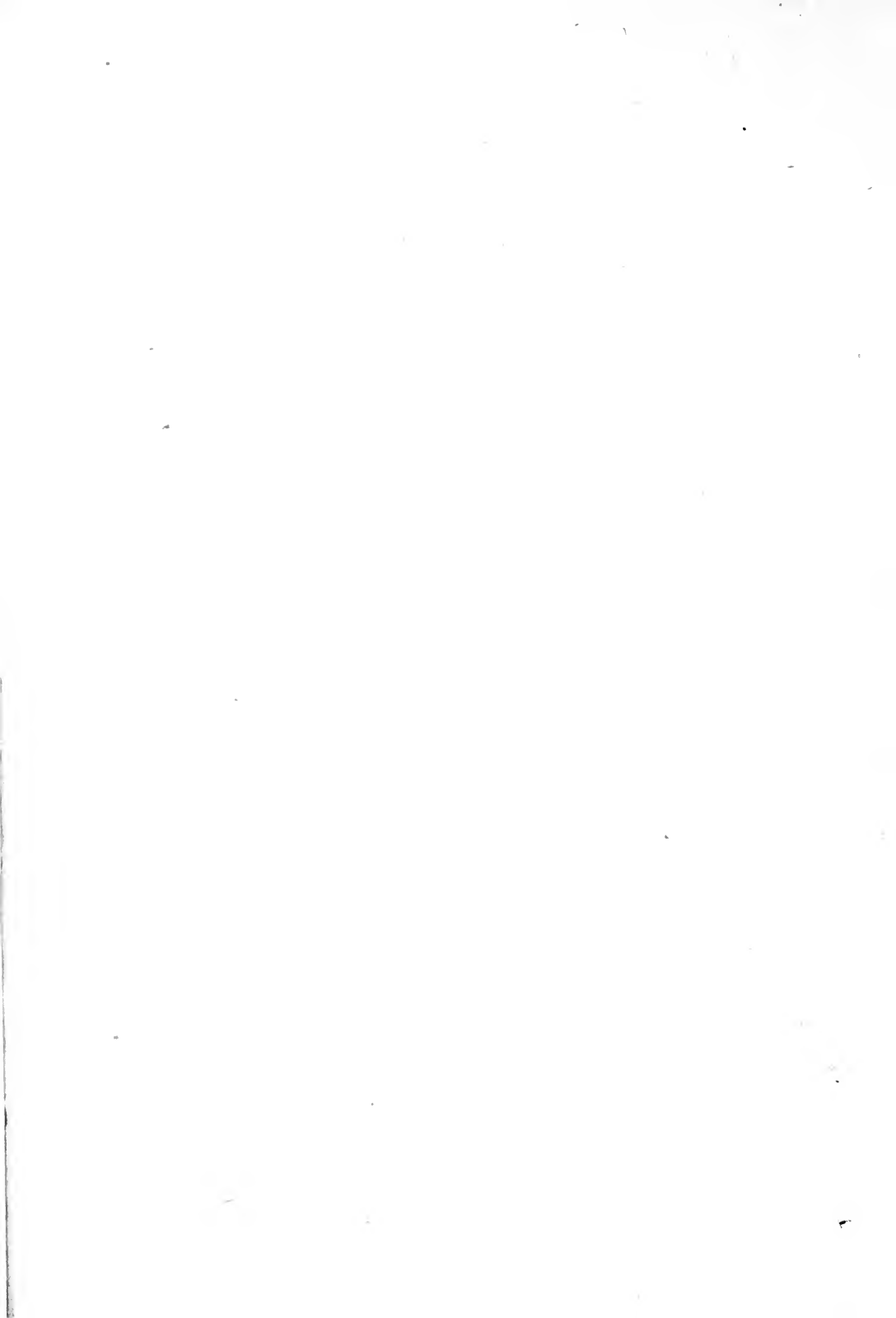
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THE ITALIAN LAKES

CHAPTER I

THE LAKE OF LUGANO

The gate of the Lombard Lakes—Characteristics of Lugano—Santa Maria degli Angeli—The Luini Frescos—Monte San Salvatore—Monte Generoso—Osteno—Porlezza.

So small a portion of the Lake of Lugano lies in Italian territory, that its inclusion in the present volume can only be warranted by the fact that it forms, as it were, the entrance gate by which the majority of travellers from the north of Europe find their way to the lake district of Northern Italy, and especially to the Lakes of Lombardy.

Those who enter the Italian kingdom by way of the Austrian frontier are greeted at once by the beautiful Lago di Garda which, unlike the Lake of Lugano, is purely Italian in its character, its atmosphere, scenery, and traditions.

Lugano and its lake, indeed, probably owe not a little of their reputation to the fact that they form, as it were, the threshold to a district which is not only one of the richest even in Italy in scenic beauty, but which

The Italian Lakes

also possesses an almost inexhaustible fund of interests at the disposal of the student of mediæval art, of history, literature, folklore, botany, and geology.

To those fresh from a journey from Basle through the St. Gothard Pass, the change from a stuffy railway carriage, very likely shared in the company of a German couple on their *voyage de noces*, who have devoted themselves to amorous triflings, embarrassing enough to any but Teutonic spectators—triflings of which the sucking of the same orange is not an uncommon, and a comparatively delicate example—to the little steamer which conveys travellers from Lugano to Porlezza and Italy, is grateful enough.

Lugano and its lake are, naturally enough perhaps, regarded by the vast majority of Anglo-Saxons whose acquaintance with Italy and her people does not penetrate below the surface as Italian in reality, though accidentally within the Helvetian Confederation.

A political severance from their Latin neighbours, however, dating from nearly four centuries back, has left its mark upon the Ticinesi of to-day—upon their character, manners and customs, if not upon their dialect. Prolonged contact with the German-Swiss, probably the most disagreeable race in Europe, has not failed to rob the inhabitants of the so-called Italian cantons of Switzerland of much of that courtesy and natural refinement which are among the pleasantest characteristics of their kinsmen across the Italian frontier.

The town of Lugano, although the largest in the Canton, has little history of any interest. At different



MORCOTE, LAGO DI LUGANO



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The Lake of Lugano

periods political refugees from Italy have made it their place of residence, and of these, at least in later times, Mazzini was the most remarkable. The physiognomist wandering through the arcades of Lugano at the present day will scarcely fail to suspect that the town is still regarded as a convenient resting-place for offenders whose misdeeds have probably been of a civil rather than a political nature, and for whom the Italian police at the frontier a few kilometres away are on the watch, for there are few places of its size in which more forbidding types of the human countenance may be met with than in the streets of this little town.

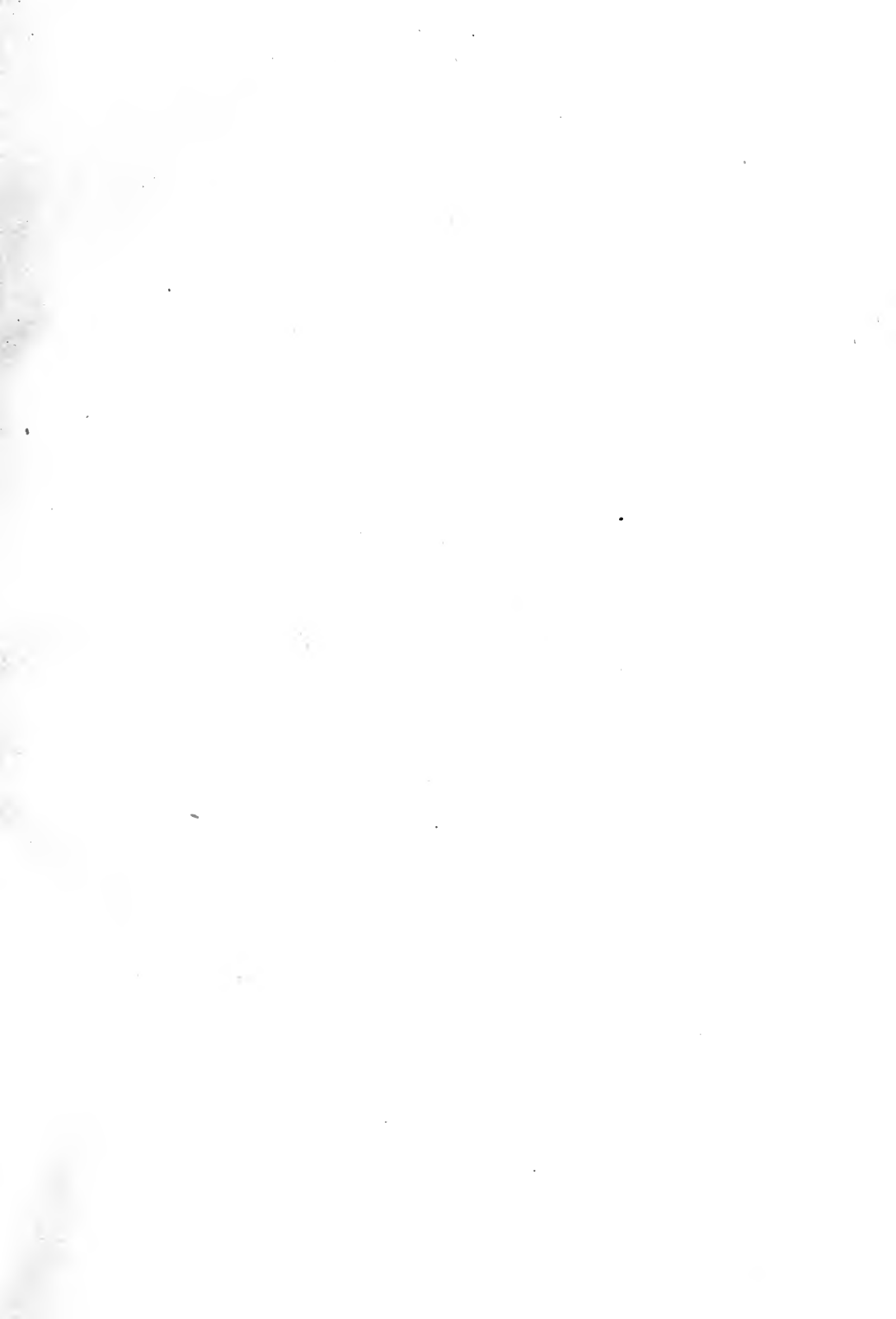
Apart from its population, Nature evidently intended Lugano and its lake to act as a kind of portal to that genuine Italy which is disclosed to the senses so soon as the mountain pass between the basin of the Lake of Lugano and that of Como has been traversed. Used as an entrance door, the Ceresian lake is admirable ; it is only when the traveller makes it his exit from Italy that its shortcomings and deceptions reveal themselves.

In Lugano itself there is certainly little to detain any but the inveterate tourist who is happy in an atmosphere of hotels and compatriots. Its most interesting object is the great fresco by Luini in the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli. It is one of the great painter's later works and, unlike many of his compositions, has had the good fortune to be left in the place for which it was painted. Its principal theme is the Crucifixion. The unpleasant subject is treated with the skill of a master-hand, able to gratify to the full the tastes of

The Italian Lakes

those to whom representations of executions and scenes of violence and death appeal. The composition and grouping of the many actors in the tragedy are superb ; and it is not until the different parts of this great fresco have been quietly and thoroughly studied that its dignity and wealth of detail can be realised. Nevertheless it is a relief, at least to those to whom such representations appeal only in a disagreeable manner, to turn away from it and visit another masterpiece of Luini's, said to be the last fresco painted by him, and bearing the date 1530. It represents the Virgin and Child, and St. John ; and a touch of childlike nature is given in the attitude of the Holy Infant towards a lamb in the foreground.

An expedition of little interest may be made from Lugano to the summit of Monte San Salvatore, up which runs a funicular railway. The view to be obtained from the top embraces the lake and surrounding mountains seen across a foreground of beer-glasses and perspiring Germans. The expedition to the summit of Monte Generoso, on the contrary, is an experience which nobody should miss, and it is more comfortably managed from Lugano than from other starting-points. A day or two at the least should be spent on Generoso, if possible at the end of June when the hotel is comparatively empty. The view is without dispute one of the most beautiful in Europe. It embraces the chain of Alps, the Lakes of Lugano, Como, Varese, and others ; the vast plains of Lombardy and Emilia to the southward as far as the Apennines rising above Bologna.



MONTE SAN SALVATORE, LAGO DI LUGANO



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The Lake of Lugano

To the eastward the mountains above Verona are visible. The charm of Generoso lies in its woods and pastures, its splendid air, and the incomparable beauty of the sunsets over the snow-capped Alps. A midsummer night on Monte Generoso is worth travelling far to enjoy, especially if it be a moonlit night. The Lake of Lugano lies more than a mile directly below, and a stone might almost be thrown from the rocks on Generoso into its waters as they flash in the moon's radiance.

Through the glades in the chestnut woods and across the meadows flit innumerable fireflies, and glow-worms gleam among the mossy banks and grey stone walls. In May and June Monte Generoso is a garden of wild flowers, and for the botanist it harbours rare treasures, as it also does for the entomologist. From this beautiful mountain—the most beautiful, as we hold, in all Italy—delightful walks may be taken down into the surrounding valleys, and to Argegno on the Lake of Como. The majority of visitors to Generoso spend at the most a couple of days on it, whereas a couple of weeks are insufficient to exhaust its beauties. There is but one thing lacking to Monte Generoso, and that is water. The mountain is almost entirely bereft of springs or streams, and the charm of its woodlands would be immeasurably increased by their presence. It would be ungracious, however, to insist on a single defect in a spot so full of varied beauties, and throughout North Italy—indeed we may almost say throughout the Italian peninsula—it would be hard to find a mountain so rich in attractions as is Monte Generoso. At the same

The Italian Lakes

time, the intending visitor will do well to choose his time for going there. After the middle of July the hotels fill with Milanese and Germans, for guide-books and advertisements have libelled Generoso by calling it the Italian Righi. The pleasantest time to enjoy a few days on the mountain is in June, when the majority of English tourists have left and the Milanese have not yet invaded its solitudes.

The villages along the shores of the Lake of Lugano should be seen in late spring and summer only, when trailing vines, flowers, and gourds do much to conceal their squalor. They are undeniably picturesque from the purely artistic point of view, but bear unmistakable testimony to the poverty of their inhabitants—a poverty, it may be added, largely due to drink, and to the idleness entailed by religious “feste.”

The principal attractions of the Lugano district consist in the chestnut and oak woods which clothe the mountains. It is difficult to say when it is most enjoyable to wander through these quiet haunts—in spring, when all Nature is bursting into renewed life, when every step reveals some freshly-opened wild flower, some unexpected glimpse of distant peaks and flashing waters framed in the vivid green of the young leaves ; in the hot hours of a summer day, when the blue haze quivers over the mountains and the lake lies like a shield of burnished metal far below, and the drowsy tinkling of the cow-bells from the higher pastures, or the monotonous rattle of the *cicale*, are the only sounds that break the intense stillness.

ORIA, LAGO DI LUGANO



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AIRBORNE



CASTAGNOLA, LAGO DI LUGANO



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associated

The Lake of Lugano

Or, again, in late autumn, when the mountain-sides are ablaze with gold and red ; when the vintage is over in the valleys, and the chestnut groves re-echo with the sound of the prickly fruit being beaten down from the trees. Even on a fine day in mid-winter, and such days are many, these woods have their charm to the lover of Nature in all her moods. Behind the gnarled stems of the older trees the mountains flash in the sunlight, dazzling in their coat of newly-fallen snow ; and between the black, leafless branches is a background of clear sky of vivid blue, which, as evening falls and the frost sets in, deepens into violet framed in a circle of fiery red. Masses of hellebore (" Christmas roses ") cover the banks, the pure whiteness of the blossoms standing out in sharp contrast with the dark foliage of the plants, and the carpet of withered leaves and mosses around them.

At Osteno, shortly before reaching Porlezza, at the end of the southern arm of the Lake of Lugano, Italian territory is reached ; and as the object both of the illustrator and of the writer of the present volume has been to offer some description of the principal lakes of North Italy, excepting that of the Lago di Garda, which it has unfortunately been found impossible to include in these pages, we very readily leave Switzerland behind us, to find ourselves upon more congenial and, as we venture to think, more artistic ground.

CHAPTER II

THE LAKE OF COMO

The approach to the lake from Porlezza—Menaggio—Leone Leoni—Nobiallo—La Madonna della Pace—Torpedo-boats and smuggling—"Protection" and some of its consequences—The Sasso Rancio—Rezzonico and Pope Clement XIII.—Cremia and its picture.

OF the various approaches to the most fascinating of all the Italian lakes, the Lago Lariano, or Lake of Como, the road leading from Porlezza to Menaggio is, next to the Brianza route, by far the most striking. It is as well to avoid the light railway which conveys tourists from Lugano and its lake, and to take a carriage previously ordered from Menaggio to meet the steamer at Porlezza. In this manner the loveliness of the scene which gradually unfolds itself as the carriage passes through a plateau rich in vineyards, meadows, and wooded glades can be enjoyed without the guttural and nasal exclamations of admiration from Germans and Americans, or vapid expressions of enthusiasm from British fellow-travellers. The carriage, moreover, has another advantage over the noisy little train. It will stop at any moment, when its occupants realise

MENAGGIO, LAGO DI COMO



Elia Anania

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The Lake of Como

that time is needed in order properly to grasp the full beauty of the views which disclose themselves in rapid succession as the road begins to descend the gorge, and the first glimpses of the Larian waters are obtained.

Shortly after leaving Porlezza, a small sheet of water, the Lago di Piano, is passed, gay in spring and early summer with yellow iris and tall, feathery reeds waving around the margin, in winter the haunt of various species of wild-fowl. Presently the high mountains above the farther shore of the Lake of Como become visible—Monte Codeno, or, as it is locally called, La Grigna, rising to a height of over seven thousand feet of rock ; Monte Legnone, with its grim, inaccessible precipices, and its wood-clad neighbour Legnoncino, where rumour has it that bears are still occasionally to be seen. A sudden turn of the road discloses a scene of such romantic beauty as to create a momentary feeling of bewilderment, an impression of unreality.

Were it not for the transparent blue haze enveloping woodland, water, and mountains, and blending the sharpness of their outlines into one harmonious whole, the general effect, especially at first sight, of this view over the upper portions of the Larian Lake might be one of artificiality. It is curious, by the way, how frequently the expression "like a scene in a play," or "like a picture," is employed to denote admiration for some more than usually beautiful piece of Nature's scene-painting. And, indeed, when the north wind in spring and summer comes tearing down from the

The Italian Lakes

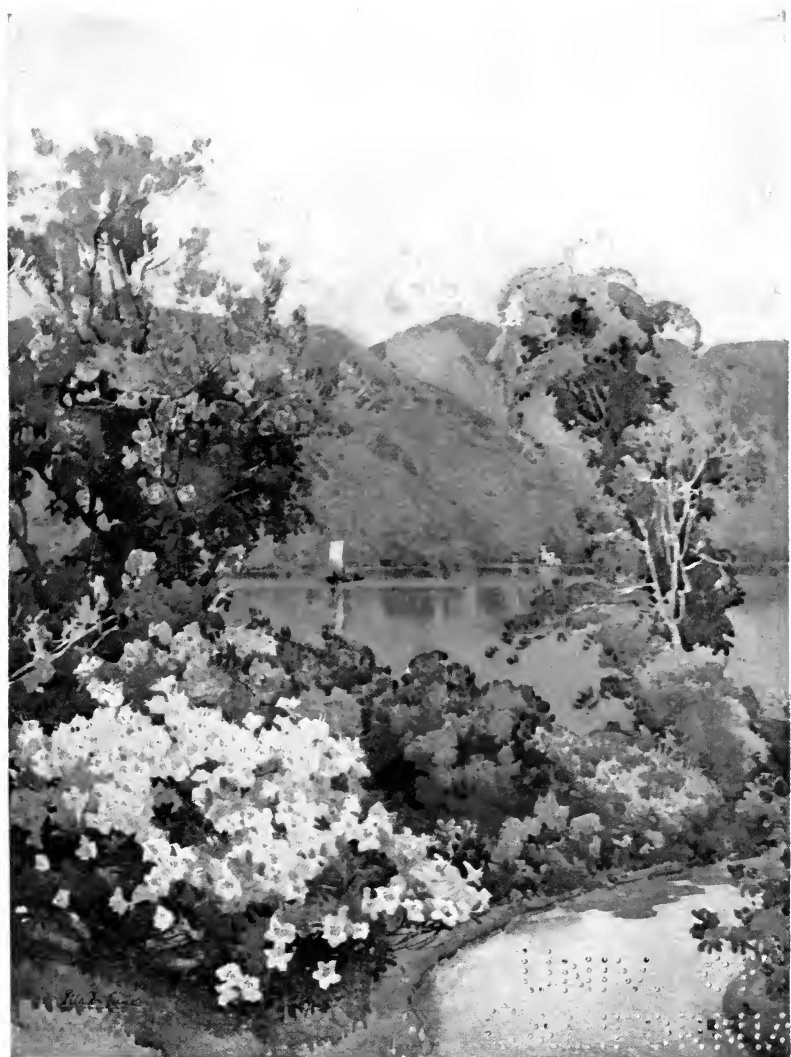
Splügen—the *vento di Colico*, as it is termed in local phraseology—the Lake of Como almost lends itself to the reproach of resembling too closely a drop-scene. Every outline then stands out sharp and distinct. The mountains look hard and forbidding; the towns at their base, and the villages nestling on their lower slopes, gleam cold and white against the vivid green of vineyards and woodland, or the dark, foam-tipped waves of the angry lake. The soft Italian atmosphere has gone, and with it the dreamy, voluptuous charm which is one of the chief attributes of the Lake of Como. From how many pictures of the lake, wrought by professionals and amateurs alike, do not those who know it in all its moods turn away with the feeling that the artist has not had the power to “catch” its atmosphere? It would be charitable to suppose that the well-known professional or the aspiring amateur had happened on days when the *vento di Colico* was blowing.

But, alas, the fact is that there exist few—very few—painters who can reproduce the indescribable delicacy, the peculiar veiled transparency of the atmosphere in the mountainous districts of Lombardy. Fortunately, however, the days when the north wind rules are comparatively rare, and during the weeks of later spring and early summer, and again in autumn, the atmospheric effects are usually at their best.

As the road from Porlezza winds down to its shore, the whole expanse, not only of the upper waters of the lake, but also of the arm known as the Lago di Lecco, is revealed. The town of Menaggio lies immediately



AZALEAS, LAGO DI COMO



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The Lake of Como

below. To the left the blue waters melt away and seem to blend themselves with the blue mountains at the head of the lake, whose higher peaks are still lightly capped with snow.

Immediately opposite Menaggio, the little town of Varenna nestles under a castle-crowned hill. To the right stretches away the Lago di Lecco, with the wooded Serbelloni peninsula in the foreground, and Bellagio, the haunt of tourists, gleaming white in the sunlight, which beats mercilessly upon it throughout the long summer days. Wherever the eye turns there is beauty—beauty of outlines, of colouring, of atmospheric effects.

There are many ways of approach to the Larian waters; but, save the drive from Como through the Brianza district to Civenna and Bellagio, the descent to the lake by the Porlezza road and the Val Menaggio is undoubtedly the most striking of them all.

As the present volume is in no sense intended to be a guide-book for tourists anxious to acquire information as to the ways and means most convenient for excursions in the Italian Lake country, but merely aims at offering some illustration and account of the many beauties and interests, scenic, artistic, historic, and social, of this favoured province of Italy, we make no excuse for conducting the reader by such paths as may best lead to artistic appreciation of a district remarkable even in Italy for the wealth of treasure, both natural and intellectual, to be found within its borders. Excuses, indeed, are due, and those of the most humble nature,

The Italian Lakes

for the superficiality with which so vast a subject as the Lake of Como and its district must perforce be treated in these pages.

It is probable that out of ten travellers who visit the Comasco province, at least six do so with the intention of gratifying the eye. Day after day passes, and from early morning, when the light of dawn creeps down the mountain-sides, to night, when the moon rises over the grim precipices of Grigna and casts a silver track across the still lake, there is no weariness in looking on the landscape—so many and so marvellous are the changes in colouring. It is scarcely to be wondered at if the large majority of visitors to the Larian Lake trouble themselves not at all concerning its history and traditions. The eye being gratified at every turn, it would seem to be almost a waste of time to endeavour to look, as it were, below the surface—to do aught but regard the scenes around us somewhat in the light of a beautiful picture, a masterly piece of scene-painting.

But the Lake of Como and its environs possess even greater claims upon the attention of those who are not content to use their eyes only than are afforded by its natural beauties. The high-road from Porlezza to Menaggio is also a path leading to a district rich in historical and artistic associations. From the earliest times when civilisation was spreading westward, the Larian Lake was regarded as one of the centres of intellectual and social life existing within the wide boundaries of the Roman Empire. The name of

The Lake of Como

Larianus alone is sufficient to establish its claim to predominance over the other lakes of northern Italy, for Cato in his *Origines* asserts the derivation of this word from an Etruscan term signifying highest in rank, and it may be presumed that the learned Roman spoke with authority. Virgil, also, addresses the Larian Lake as *Te Lari Maxime*.

We may not unreasonably conclude that something more than mere extent was implied when the lake was invested with similar attributes of predominancy over its fellows, since in actual size the Lake of Como is surpassed by its near neighbour Lago Maggiore, and by the Lake of Garda, with both of which the Roman world was familiar.

As we shall have occasion subsequently to show, the province of Como and its lake was the chosen resort of some of the most intellectual among the ancient Romans, a secure retreat far from the corrupt life of the capital and its scenes of intrigue and violence under the Claudian Cæsars. On the shores of the Larian Lake, in their villas and country seats, we may imagine with what pleasure such men as the elder and younger Pliny, and the circle they gathered round them, gave themselves up to the simple joys of a country life, and drew from the beauty of the scenery fresh inspiration and renewed vigour both of mind and body. The fascination exercised by the *Lacus Larianus* on such spirits and the attachment they felt for its shores are handed down in glowing language in the letters of the younger Pliny, language which we shall quote in another chapter.

The Italian Lakes

If, however, the Lake of Como has a part in the social and intellectual history of ancient Rome, it plays an even more prominent rôle in mediæval history and in the annals of mediæval art. Indeed, it may be said to be divided into two distinct zones—the classical zone, which ends with the rocky promontory crowned by the Serbellone villa and its surrounding woods—the Punto di Bellagio, as it is locally termed—and the mediæval zone, which embraces the whole lake from Como to Colico, but which increases in historic interest as the northern and wilder portions of its waters are reached.

It is to this, the centre of what we may call the mediæval zone of interest, that the traveller who approaches the Lake of Como by road from Porlezza is immediately introduced, and with it he is introduced also to the finest parts of the Lago Lariano.

The town of Menaggio, except for the beauty of its situation, is not specially attractive. The population, too, is somewhat rougher than that of the other towns and villages on the lake, and the inhabitants of this commune used to be none too well looked upon by their neighbours. They bore an unenviable fame for being *gente di mala fede*, a reputation very different from that enjoyed by the average natives of the Comasco district, who are as a rule both faithful and honest. There would seem, indeed, to exist some traditional mistrust of the people of Menaggio, for in the days of the first Napoleon they were said to be unable to keep faith even with each other. There is a strong clerical party in this little town ; and the result

The Lake of Como

is that perpetual strife rages with the more enlightened members of the community, who resent the interference of the clergy and their confederates in their political and social life.

The Castle of Menaggio, of which little remains but a ruined wall, was at one time a fortress of considerable strength and importance. It was sacked in the twelfth century during the long wars between the cities of Como and Milan, and afterwards became a stronghold of the Visconti.

Immediately behind Menaggio is the romantic Val Sanagra, a secluded pass leading through chestnut groves and pastures watered by a rocky stream into the recesses of the mountains.

The medallist and bronze-worker Leoni, or, as he was also called, the Cavaliere d'Aretino, is said to have been born at Menaggio. Count Giambattista Giovio, in a letter dated November 1802 (*Lettere Lariane*), mentions that descendants of Leone Leoni were still living at Menaggio at that period. He was largely employed by the Emperor Charles V., who, in reward for a bronze statue of himself made by the artist, conferred a patent of nobility and a pension upon him. The finest specimens of his work known to us are to be found in Milan Cathedral, where, by command of Pope Pius IV., Leoni executed the tomb of the famous Gian Giacomo de' Medici, Il Medeghino, the Pontiff's brother. Leone Leoni appears to have been an individual of singularly forbidding character. He is described as being of an avaricious and violent temper,

The Italian Lakes

and was, on at least one occasion, imprisoned for assault.

From the little village of Lovenò, immediately above Menaggio, magnificent views of the lake can be obtained, and there are, moreover, several gardens well worthy of a visit, such as those of the Villa Mylius and the Villa Vigone.

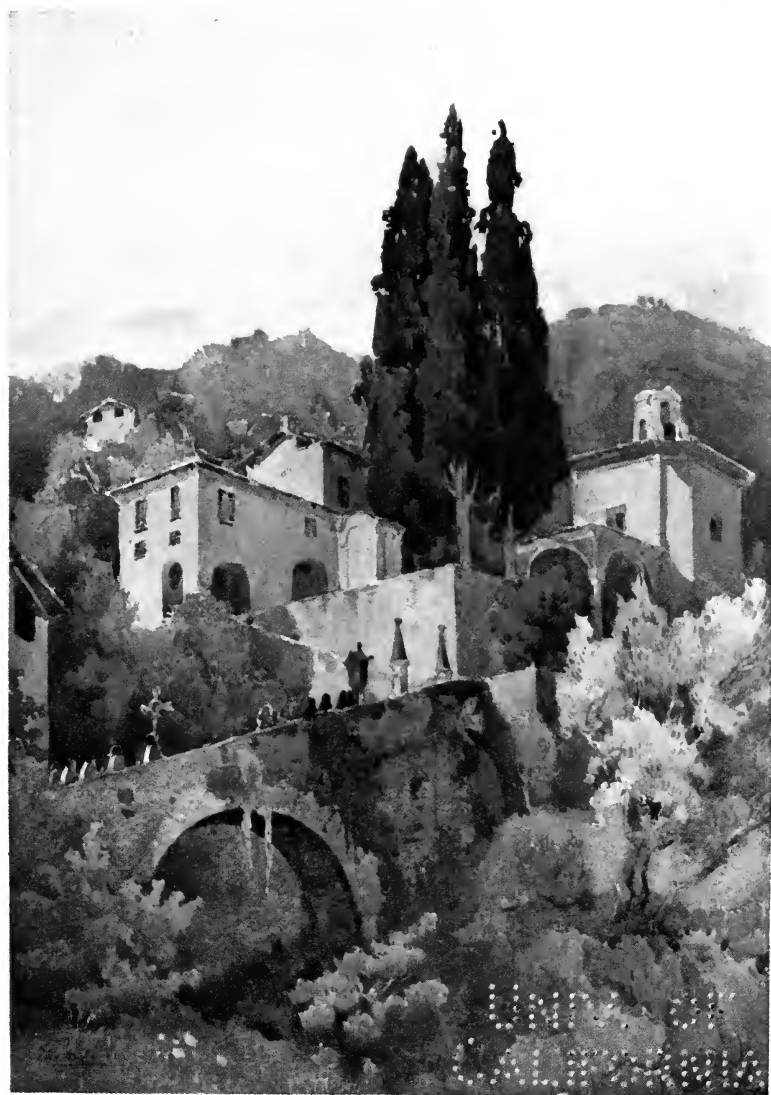
Scattered about Menaggio, and usually to be found built into the walls of comparatively modern houses and churches, are various ancient inscriptions and pieces of sculpture. Embedded in the outer wall of the church of Santa Marta is the tombstone of a Roman official who evidently held high posts in the province of Como in the first century A.D., the following translation of which is quoted from the Rev. T. E. Lunn's work, *Como and Italian Lakeland* :—

“L. M. E. son of Lucius of the tribe Ofentina, flamen of the deified Titus Vespasian, by the consent of the decurions' military tribunal, quattuorvir edile, decemvir of justice, prefect of the artisans of Cæsar and of the Consul, pontifex—to himself and his consort Geminia Prisca, daughter of Quintus, and to Minicia Bisia, daughter of Lucius, he made this in his lifetime.”

Mr. Lunn observes that this inscription was originally found at the neighbouring village of Rezzonico. It is interesting inasmuch as it affords us a glimpse of the workings of the colonial system of the Cæsars, the words “prefect of the artisans of Cæsar” having a special significance which will be the better understood when



LA MADONNA DELLA PACE,
LAGO DI COMO



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the portions of the Lake of Como which we have ventured to term the classical zone are visited.

A leisurely row of twenty minutes or so in a small boat brings us to the village of Nobiallo, and thence a short walk of a few hundred metres will lead us up to a little piazza, guarded by stately cypress trees of unusual girth and height, on which stands the church of Santa Maria della Pace. The spot is worth the trouble of the short climb up the stony track which until recently was the only roadway on this side of the lake. The view from the little green plateau is magnificent—but then the same may be said of every point around us. Wherever the eye turns, it is to meet fresh beauty ; but we would refrain as much as possible from making comments which could scarcely be other than vain repetitions, the more so as the reader has Miss Du Cane's illustrations to aid the imagination, or to refresh the memory.

The quiet little plateau in front of Santa Maria della Pace is indeed a peaceful place enough in which to dream away an hour under the shadow of the tall cypresses. And every now and then, if one's dreams become too complicated, if the why and the wherefore of the present and the ever-looming mystery of the future become too disheartening a problem to dwell upon, a glance into the great space above us and at the eternal question-stop which Nature has placed at the top of every cypress tree standing out in dark relief against the deep blue of the summer sky, will probably do much towards simplifying matters. One asks one-

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self, when looking at the cypress's trembling note of interrogation, whether it were not in a gentle spirit of irony that the tree was first selected as suitable to adorn the resting-places of our dead.

After rounding the little promontory of La Gaeta, we come to a district of which every yard may be said to be historic ground. The presence of a couple of ugly torpedo-boats lying at anchor in a secluded bay strikes a jarring note amidst the peaceful beauty of the surrounding scenery, and causes the traveller to wonder against what unseen enemy they could possibly have to be employed. He will notice that on one at least of the *torpediniere* steam is being kept up, as though at any moment its services might be required. These vessels are here to give chase to the smugglers who ply their trade with considerable success in this part of the Lake of Como. The vicinity of the Swiss frontier makes it comparatively easy to run cargoes of contraband goods, especially of tobacco and cigars, spirits and other articles, into Italian territory. We have here an object lesson which the advocates in England of a system of protection would do well to study. In Italy, as is well known, that system is carried out to its full extent. Not only luxuries, but every article necessary to daily existence, are ruthlessly taxed. Tobacco, salt, matches, spirits, petroleum, sugar, and many other necessities are either Government monopolies or liable to so heavy a duty as to be practically luxuries to the poorer classes of the community. The misery produced by this retrograde and short-sighted policy is incalcul-

EVENING, LAGO DI COMO



TO THE
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The Lake of Como

able. But it is a misery which is discreetly hidden in the background. The capitalist benefits by it, and it is as a rule the capitalist in some form or another with whom the foreign visitor to Italy is brought into contact. The foreigner does not, in nine cases out of ten, have very much opportunity of looking behind the scenes. He is probably debarred by ignorance of the language, by the traditional English misconceptions of the character and nature of the Italian lower orders, by class prejudices, from placing himself on those terms of equality and sympathy with the people which alone can break down such barriers and lead to mutual confidence and understanding. Moreover, between him and the real life of the country he visits stands the army of hotel-keepers and all their myrmidons, generally not Italians at all, but Germans and Swiss who are engaged in exploiting the unfortunate people upon whom they have fixed themselves like leeches since the opening of the St. Gothard railway some three-and-twenty years ago.

To understand the social and economical condition of the people, and, therefore, to have any acquaintance with the genuine Italy and not the Italy of the guide-books and the popular novelists, it is necessary to turn one's back on the "Grand" hotels, on one's compatriots settled in their villas or their apartments in the country—snails for the most part these last, who have planted themselves on a foreign soil, but who have been unable to leave their English shells behind them—it is necessary to turn a deaf, or at all events an unconvinced ear to

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their tales concerning the people they have chosen to live among but not to live with, and to judge for oneself, by personal experience, objectively.

It is very easy for the English or American visitor to Italy to condemn what he finds when he gets there. It is even natural that he should do so. He comes from a free country to a country which has jumped out of the frying-pan of priestly into the fire of bureaucratic tyranny and misgovernment.

The reader will ask what all this has to do with torpedo-boats lying at anchor in the bay of Acqua Seria. Their presence in those inland waters is one of the many examples of maladministration on the part of the authorities who are responsible for the present misgovernment of Italy. Owing to the heavy taxation levied upon necessities, the peasant lives a mere hand-to-mouth existence. In many villages the people go to bed after sunset in the winter months because they are unable to afford themselves the luxury of a lamp, owing to the excessive cost of petroleum, which, owing to the duty imposed, is sold at a prohibitive cost. We in England are scarcely able, thanks to our system of free trading, to realise a similar state of things. It is not to be wondered at if the younger and more energetic men find, under such circumstances, that smuggling is a profitable trade, nor that any means whereby the necessities of life may be obtained without having to pay a prohibitive price for them are adopted by the poorer inhabitants of the various communes. The result is demoralising in the extreme. A premium is

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placed upon smuggling and illicit trading, and young men and lads are encouraged to band themselves together to lead a life which must of necessity end in disaster. Their ill-gotten gains, moreover, are very rarely spent except on drink and dissipation ; and while the community at large may derive some benefit from a boatload of contraband goods which have been brought in the dead of night down some remote pass from the Swiss frontier and embarked at some creek along the shores of the lake, the smugglers themselves are morally, if not materially, the worse for every successful *coup* they may bring off.

It is much to be wished that tourists staying at the hotels on the Lake of Como would decline to aid so discreditable a trade, and refuse to buy smuggled tobacco, cigars, and other articles which are sometimes offered to them by boatmen and others. If they could realise the harm they are doing by commissioning these men to procure contraband articles for them, and knew in what manner the greater part of their purchase-money is generally spent, they would no doubt refuse to have any dealings or connivance with this illegal occupation.

As we have pointed out, the fact that such a trade exists, and that it is found to be both necessary and profitable on the Italian frontiers, is largely if not entirely due to the grave abuse of the system of protection which must always prevent Italy from being a really rich or prosperous nation.

The expense incurred by the Government for the

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maintenance of the large body of Custom officers and men necessary to guard the Swiss border is enormous. In recent years it has been considered necessary to place torpedo-destroyers—*cacciatorpediniere*—on the Lake of Como, and even on the small portion of the Lake of Lugano situated in Italian territory. In addition to the cost of keeping up these craft, there is, on the Lake of Como, a powerful electric searchlight installed which sweeps the main waters of the lake, and also those of the Lake of Lecco. This appliance works nightly from dusk to dawn, at a cost of very nearly a hundred francs, or four pounds sterling, per night !

Besides these elaborate precautions against smuggling, light boats, directed by an officer and rowed at a great pace by strong, able-bodied young *doganieri*, who ply their oars in a standing position, patrol the shores of the lake at all hours of the day and night.

It is almost incredible that, under so many adverse conditions, smuggling should be possible ; and, indeed, in no other country but misgoverned Italy could it exist to any extent in the face of such apparently well-organised measures for its suppression.

We have here, however, but one example of the countless instances revealing the utter and complete bureaucratic corruption which eats like a cancer into every organ of Italian public life—that corruption which was the true cause of the terrible defeat at Adowa, which arrests and stultifies the course of justice ; which permeates the administrative departments of the army, the navy, the law, the municipal institutions, and

PALLANZA FROM ISOLA BELLA,
LAGO MAGGIORE



TO THE
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The Lake of Como

allows public officials to connive at frauds which in any other civilised land would place them in the felon's dock ; and which, as countless honourable Italians of all classes of society sorrowfully confess, has no parallel in any European country save the unhappy Russian Empire. We are fully aware that this indictment is a strong indictment ; but we are conscious of having full authority for making it, and we are only repeating what certain eminent Italians have had the courage to utter in high places.

But to return to our smugglers. It would certainly be imagined that, as we have already said, preventive measures, representing so large an outlay on the part of the State—and, consequently, so much money out of the pockets of the taxpayers—would at all events diminish, if not entirely suppress, smuggling in these districts. As a matter of fact, except for periodical seizures of contraband goods deposited in places already agreed upon between the smugglers and the “authorities,”—seizures which may be described as “complimentary,” and effected in order to keep up appearances,—no practical results are obtained by these measures.

The electric searchlight which sweeps the lake at a cost of a hundred francs a night is, by some unlucky chance, turned in an opposite direction to that taken by the little boat which, creeping out of some cave among the rocks, is rowed swiftly and silently under the shadow of the shore till its destination is safely reached and its cargo is delivered to the men who are waiting to receive it. A few minutes afterwards, perhaps, the

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boat will return, and suddenly the full blaze of the searchlight will be thrown on it. A long, narrow craft will come tearing through the water, and the rowers of the boat will rest on their oars as it shoots up alongside of them. The *doganieri* will overhaul the boat. They will look under the seats, and even perhaps search the boatmen, who submit to the process very cheerfully. Indeed, everybody is cheerful—and why not, since all parties are satisfied? In the meantime the contraband cargo is being carried up to some neighbouring cottage, or being deposited in some disused shed, and the officers of the State disappear into the darkness with the pleasant consciousness of having added a few lire to their insufficient salaries.

We have heard, and we regard our information as proceeding from a source which we may term semi-official, of an occasion when a brigadier of *finanzieri* assisted at the unloading of a contraband cargo of sugar and tobacco, and obligingly “lent a hand,” at the same time carefully counting each package in order to be sure that he was not being robbed of his profits on the night’s work.

It is not surprising if under such circumstances the smuggling bands contrive to pursue their operations notwithstanding the precautions taken by the Government to protect its revenues. Nor, perhaps, need we blame either the smugglers or their confederates too severely. Both are, after all, only imitating the example of their betters in Rome and elsewhere, who not only rob the State with impunity, but who, if

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sufficiently successful, acquire honours and titles for doing so.

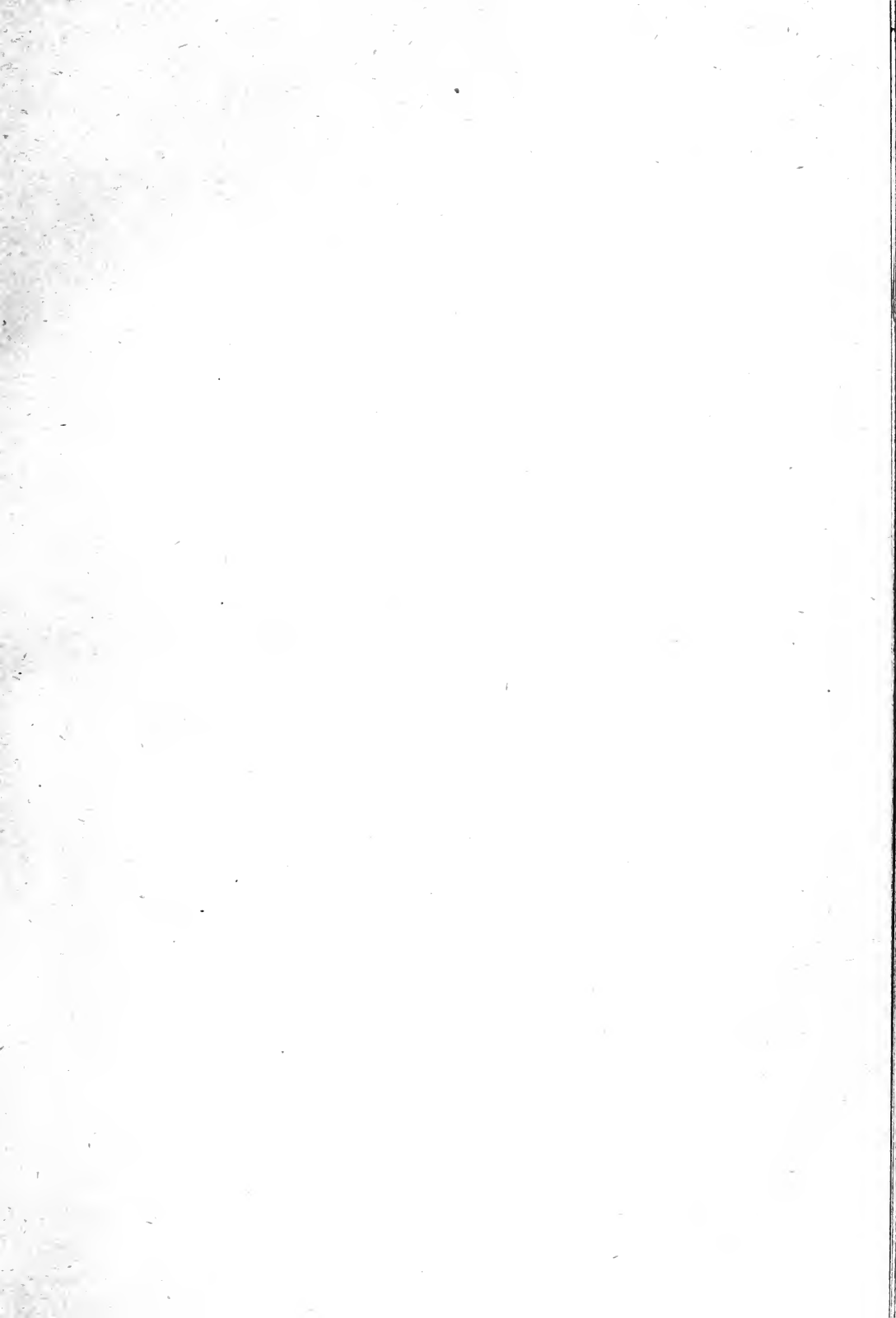
It is, however, the system which creates such evils that deserves both blame and contempt. The rotten—for no other term sufficiently expresses its condition—state of Italian bureaucracy, and the social and economic disasters which that bureaucracy is inevitably bound to bring upon the nation unless it be subjected to speedy and sweeping reforms, are not subjects to be discussed in these pages. We may have a lurking sympathy with our smugglers, inasmuch as they are driven by the harsh and short-sighted fiscal laws of their country to bring into their villages articles regarded as necessities of life, on which prohibitive duties are levied ; and, were the money they made expended for the good of their families or for their well-being generally there would be little to be said by any one able to look at the matter from a broad-minded—if not strictly moral—point of view. Unfortunately, however, the money made by smuggling is almost invariably ill spent. It goes into the tills of the wine-shops, if it does not go into worse places ; and those who take part in smuggling are by no means the worthiest members of their community.

The presence of torpedo-boats on the quiet waters of the Larian Lake is not, however, quite so incongruous as one is at first inclined to think. History, we are always assured, repeats itself ; and although these strange-looking craft would have considerably perplexed and astonished the inhabitants of the towns and villages in mediæval days, ships of war were to them no un-

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common sight, and especially so in the immediate vicinity of Acqua Seria. The sight of the torpedo-boats of the modern Italian Government, indeed, seems to carry one's thoughts back to those far-off days when this particular portion of the lake was the theatre of fierce battles on land and on water, of sieges and raids, of acts of piracy on a miniature high sea, none the less ferocious and arbitrary because of the limited area in which they were committed. Or, again, in times more near to our own, when, in 1799, the Austrians and Russians in alliance drove the French troops out of Lombardy, the steep path winding along the edge of the high cliff known as the Sasso Rancio rang with the clash of arms as a Russian army on its way to attack the French garrison in Milan passed, partly by water and partly by this perilous track, down the lake from Colico to Como. To that portion of Marshal Suwaroff's force which marched by land a tragedy occurred during the passage round this rock. The horses of a squadron of cavalry became restive, and plunged with their riders from the narrow pathway into the lake below. Notwithstanding the height above the lake of this path, a Russian officer and his horse both escaped unhurt after taking this plunge—so, at least, Count Giambattista Giovio asserts in one of his "Lettere Lariane," written soon after the event.

The village of Acqua Seria itself is of no particular attraction, and we may hasten on to Rezzonico with its imposing mediæval castle, from which the noble family of Della Torre di Rezzonico took its name and



OLEANDERS



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title. The fortress must have been one of considerable strength and importance in the early Middle Ages, and probably long before that period, since the name Rezzonico is said to be derived from the Latin *Rhaetionicum*, in which case the place was doubtless a fortified settlement of the Gallic Rhaetians. The Rezzonico family was one of the most distinguished in Lombardy. One of its branches settled in Venice, and of this branch came Count Carlo Rezzonico, Bishop of Padua, who subsequently ascended the Papal throne in 1758 under the name of Clement XIII. He was elected Pope in July 1758, and was a man of a singularly benign and kindly nature, as well as of great piety. His pontificate, however, was a stormy one politically, and he was practically a creature in the hands of the Society of Jesus. The great Catholic Powers of France, Spain, and Portugal being at that time resolved to banish the Jesuits from those countries, pressure was brought to bear upon Clement XIII. to induce him definitely to suppress the society, and for some years his reign was disturbed by the perpetual intrigues in connexion with this question. At length the Catholic Governments seemed to have gained their point. The Pope had issued, in 1765, an apostolic brief, in which he strongly supported the Society of Jesus against its enemies; but soon after this he was said to have yielded to the unanswerable arguments of the ambassadors of France and Spain, and to the fear of offending the sovereigns they represented. A Consistory was summoned, at which Clement XIII. was to

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have pronounced, as it was believed, his decree suppressing the Society. But in the meantime the Pope was seized with a sudden and mysterious illness—one of those illnesses so common at the Vatican in mediæval days, and not unknown in our own, which proved fatal in a few hours, and he died on February 3, 1769.

Visitors to the Church of St. Peter at Rome will probably recollect the striking tomb of this Pope, designed and executed by Canova, the more so as it is remarkable for its artistic qualities in a building in which debased and meretricious forms of art reign supreme.

A short distance beyond Rezzonico is the picturesque village of Cremia, the proud possessor of one of Paolo Cagliari's (Paolo Veronese) best paintings. This is to be found in the parish church of San Michele, where it serves as an altar-piece. It represents the battle between the archangel St. Michael and the spirit of Evil. It is described at length by Giambattista Giovio in his "*Lettere Lariane*," and also by another well-known writer on Larian subjects, Abbondio Lena Perpenta, himself a member of a distinguished Comasco family. The figure of the archangel is majestic and dignified, very different from the theatrical and effeminate conception of Guido Reni in his well-known painting of the same subject. The effect of rapid downward flight is admirably reproduced in the outstretched wings; and, instead of the foolish simper which Guido Reni has given to his St. Michael, the archangel's countenance is endowed with an expression in which conscious strength and lofty disdain are cleverly



OLEANDERS, ISOLA MADRE, LAGO MAGGIORE



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mingled. The figure of the struggling fiend, indeed, is not a little laughable in the bogeyism with which the painter has evidently tried hard to invest it, and we refuse to shiver with horror and aversion, as both Giovio and Lena Perpenta, and obviously Paolo Veronese himself would have us do. For the rest, the colouring of the picture is superb, and we can only regret that it should be hidden away in a village church where so few can have an opportunity of seeing it. It was placed in its present position in 1586, two years before the death of the painter, and was presented to Crema by a Count Pezzetta, a landed proprietor in the place. The frame of the painting was made in the same year. Giambattista Giovio tells a story which redounds to the credit of the local authorities of Crema at the end of the eighteenth century. It appears that Count de Firmian, the Emperor's representative in Lombardy, who was an enthusiastic collector, offered a large sum of money for the picture, at the same time promising to replace it with an exact copy. The village authorities met in solemn council to discuss the proposal, and perhaps the Minister Plenipotentiary's money tempted some of its members to part with the picture. However this may have been, the story goes that an old villager rose in his place in the assembly and spoke as follows:—

“Compagni, due grosse eredità ci lasciarono i nostri avi-quel quadro ed il presente debito comunale. Li prenda ambedue il Signor Conte ministro Plenipotenziario.”

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It may be doubted whether this patriotic inhabitant of Crema spoke in such good Italian ; and the language is probably that of Giovio, while the sentiments were no doubt those of the village elder in question.

The Minister evidently had no desire to take over the debts of the commune of Crema as well as its picture, and the Paolo Veronese remains in the place it has occupied for over three centuries.

CHAPTER III

THE LAKE OF COMO

The Castle of Musso and "Il Medeghino."

TOWERING above the lake, and crowning a mass of rock nearly five hundred feet in height, stand the remnants of one of the most important and historically interesting of the fortresses not only on the Lake of Como but, it might almost be said, in the whole of North Italy. The Castle of Musso, a short distance to the north of Crema, is perched upon its precipitous crag like an eagle's nest. It dominates the whole of the upper waters of the Lake of Como as far as the promontory of Bellagio on the right hand and the Lago di Lecco to beyond distant Lierna. On the left it commands the entire northern portion of the lake, the Lake of Mezzola, the plains of Colico, and the famous Valtellina pass as far as Morbagno. Immediately in front, above the opposite promontory of Piona rise the slopes of Legnoncino, and the lofty precipices of Monte Legnone. This magnificent view is perhaps the finest in the whole lake country of Lombardy, and is certainly the most remarkable for the points of historical interest embraced by it.

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The castle of Musso must have been a place of great strength from the earliest times, owing to its natural position. Previous to the year 1400 it belonged to the little independent state, known as the Republic *delle Tre Pievi*, in which were incorporated the neighbouring towns of Drago, Gravedona and Sorico, together with the adjacent lands. This miniature republic, the San Marino of its day, was of very early origin, and for several centuries independent of the rulers of Lombardy. Towards the middle of the fifteenth century, however, its independence collapsed, and it became absorbed in the fiefs of the great families of the district, who had long coveted its territory. At the close of the year 1500, the *Tre Pievi*, then occupied by the French invaders of Lombardy, were bestowed, together with the fortress of Musso, on Marshal Gian Giacomo Trivulzio, who, notwithstanding the great Lombard name he bore, had placed his influence and military talent at the service of the enemies of his country.

It was this warrior who, in view of the great changes that were being introduced into the art of warfare by the use of artillery, proceeded to render the castle of Musso not only impregnable, but also to construct fortifications which should enable it to command the approaches to the lake from the Valtellina and the north, as well as possible invasions from Como, Lecco, and the Milanese. But it was in the hands of an adventurer that the castle of Musso became the strongest fortress in Lombardy, if not in all North Italy.

This extraordinary individual was a young man of

A VILLA GARDEN, LAGO D' ORTA

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the name of Gian Giacomo Medici. He was born in Milan in 1495, the son of one Bernardo Medici and Cecilia, a daughter of the noble house of Serbelloni. Bernardo Medici, who appears to have occupied the position of "farmer" (*appaltatore*) of the public taxes at Milan, had thirteen children, of whom the eldest, Gian Giacomo, became successively Marquis of Musso, Count of Lecco, Viceroy of Bohemia, and, finally, Marquis of Marignano; the second son, Giovanni Angelo, became Pope under the name of Pius IV., and a daughter who married a Borromeo and was the mother of the great Archbishop of Milan, San Carlo Borromeo.

The career of Gian Giacomo Medici, or "Il Medeghino," as he was universally called, is so full of adventure and historical interest, and his name is so bound up with the mediæval traditions of the Lake of Como, that we are not afraid of wearying our readers by describing it more or less fully.

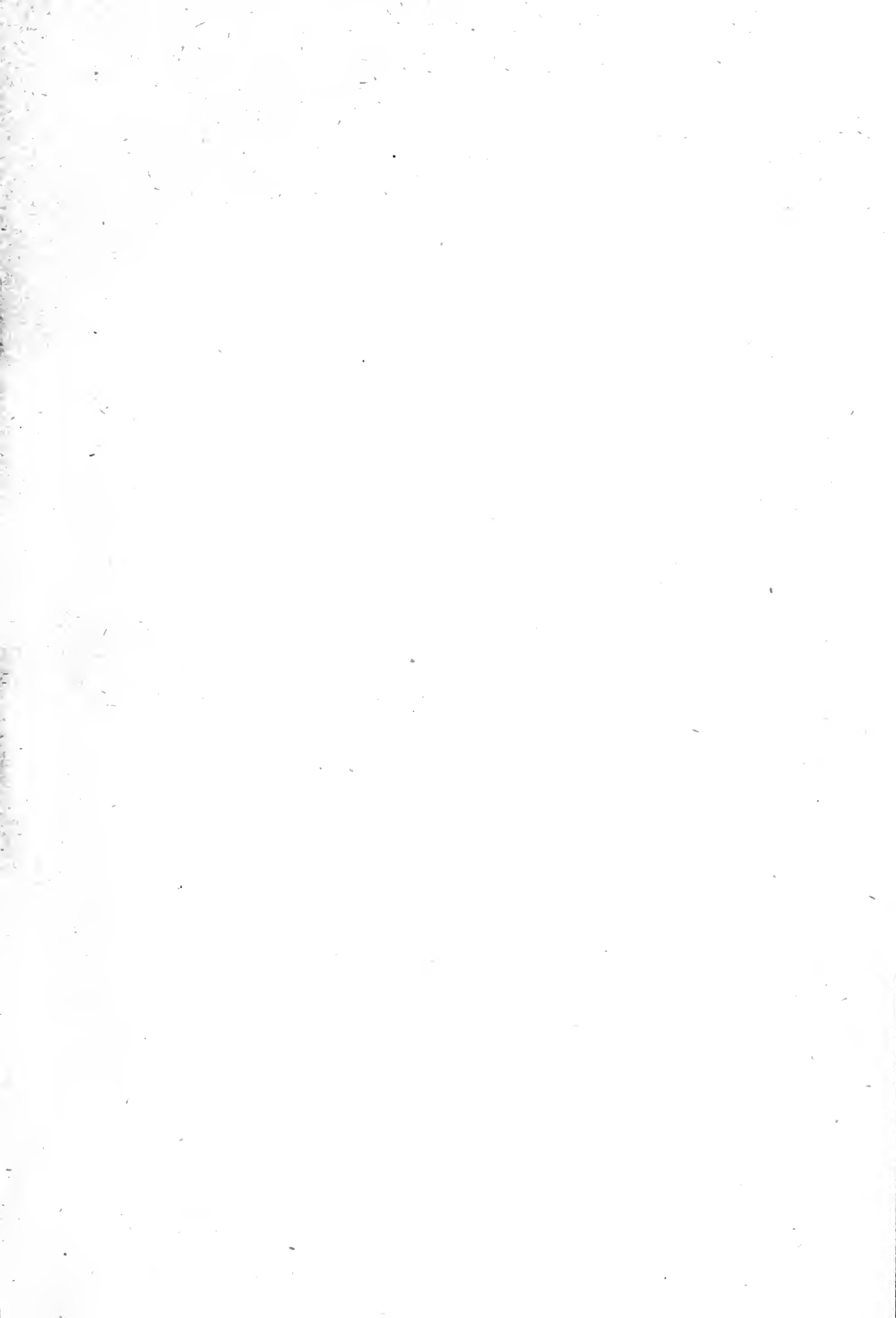
When Il Medeghino came into the world, Lombardy was in the hands of the French. The Spaniards and the Germans, however, were ceaselessly intriguing to gain possession of this, the richest province in Italy, while the Milanese and Lombards themselves were distraught by the factions of rival competitors of their own race for the Duchy and its government. From a boy, Gian Giacomo would seem to have been of an ambitious and unscrupulous nature, determined at all costs to rise to a prominent position in the world. He was acute enough to realise that in the unsettled and distracted

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state of his country lay his opportunity for attaining his object. His career began by a murder, and strangely enough this crime was the stepping-stone to his future success. When he was sixteen he planned an ambush for another youth and killed him, and for this murder he was exiled from Milan to the Lake of Como.

At that time the whole of the Larian district was divided into factions, respectively supporting the French and the great house of Sforza, which last aimed at driving out the foreigners and possessing itself of the Lombard Duchy. The young Gian Giacomo made friends with the chief supporter of the Sforza, a certain Giovanni del Motto da Brenzio, and threw in his lot with the anti-French party. It is said that from the first moment in which he beheld the Castle of Musso he determined to become its possessor and use it as a fortress, whence he could command the district and rise to the power and position at which he aimed.

The Duke Sforza was then at Trent, awaiting the hour when the Milanese should rise in open revolt against the French and expel them from Lombardy. The Milanese, exasperated by the severity of the French government and hating the foreigner, were ripe for such a revolt, and Gian Giacomo quickly gathered the youth of the city and the Milanese nobility round him. Way-laying a French courier bearing important despatches, he killed him and possessed himself of the documents, which he caused to be conveyed to the Sforza, thus placing the Duke under a debt of obligation to him. In 1521 the French abandoned Milan, and in April of



TERRACE, ISOLA BELLA, LAGO MAGGIORE



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the following year the Sforza entered it as Duke Francesco II. The new sovereign had for his Minister and Governor of Milan one Morone, to whom Il Medeghino speedily addressed himself. He dwelt upon the services he had rendered to the Sforza cause, and asked that in return for them he should be appointed Governor of the castle of Musso. His request was granted, but with a condition attached to the grant. Morone summoned the Medici to his presence, and explained to him that the Duke was willing to accede to his request, but that he must render him one more service before his appointment to the governorship of Musso could be finally approved of. The service was no less than that the Medici should murder Astorre Visconti, the young head of the noblest house in Lombardy, the future successful rivals of the Sforza dynasty. Astorre Visconti, nicknamed *Il Monsignorino*, was allied by blood with all the most powerful families of Lombardy and the Veneto, and had rendered services to the Sforza no less valuable than those of Il Medeghino himself. Visconti, however, was of an arrogant and overbearing nature, and the Duke was probably afraid of his influence and jealous of his popularity.

Notwithstanding the fact that he and Astorre Visconti were friends and brothers-in-arms, the Medici determined to carry out the condition imposed upon him rather than lose the appointment he coveted.

He confided in a certain bravo, Antonio del Pozzo, and the two lay in wait one evening for Astorre Visconti at the corner of a lane by which they knew he must pass.

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On his appearance, accompanied by only a small escort, Il Medeghino spurred his horse into the middle of the band and buried his sword in Il Monsignorino's body, killing him instantly, and succeeding in escaping himself before those round the victim realised what had occurred.

This barbarous assassination, however, was deeply resented by the Milanese, and the Sforza found himself in so serious a difficulty, that he resolved to rid himself of Il Medeghino, lest it should become known that the latter had acted under his instructions.

The Duke caused the official documents duly conferring the governorship of the castle of Musso on Gian Giacomo Medici to be made out, and presented them to him, with the permission to proceed at once to Musso to take up his post. At the same time he handed him a sealed letter addressed to the commandant of the castle, Giovanni Visconti. This letter, the Duke assured him, contained the warrant authorising the commandant to deliver over the custody of the castle to Il Medeghino, who was instructed to deliver it immediately into that officer's hands on arrival at Musso. Il Medeghino took the documents and the sealed letter, and set out for Musso without delay. On his journey thither, however, his suspicions as to the contents of the letter became aroused, and he broke the seal and read them. Far from being a warrant under the Duke's own hand to deliver over the fortress, the letter was an order to the commandant Visconti immediately to arrest the Medici and put him to instant and secret death within the castle walls. The astute Gian Giacomo kept his own counsel,

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but at the same time is said—though the story is improbable—deftly to have altered the contents of the missive in such a way as to make them coincide with the official document appointing him to the governorship. On arriving at Musso he found the castle occupied by a Spanish garrison under Visconti's orders. On learning that these Spaniards were there much against their will, and were only too ready to be relieved of their duties, Il Medeghino made them a present of money and dismissed them, replacing them by a body of men drawn from among his friends and supporters in the neighbourhood. Once inside the fortress, he made no secret of his intention of holding it against all comers, and assumed the title of Castellano di Musso. Not a word was said by Il Medeghino to the Sforza concerning the act of treachery to which he had so narrowly escaped falling a victim; and the Duke, relieved perhaps to have got his accomplice in the murder of Astorre Visconti out of Milan, found it more convenient to forget that the sealed letter had ever existed, and left the Medici undisturbed in his appointment.

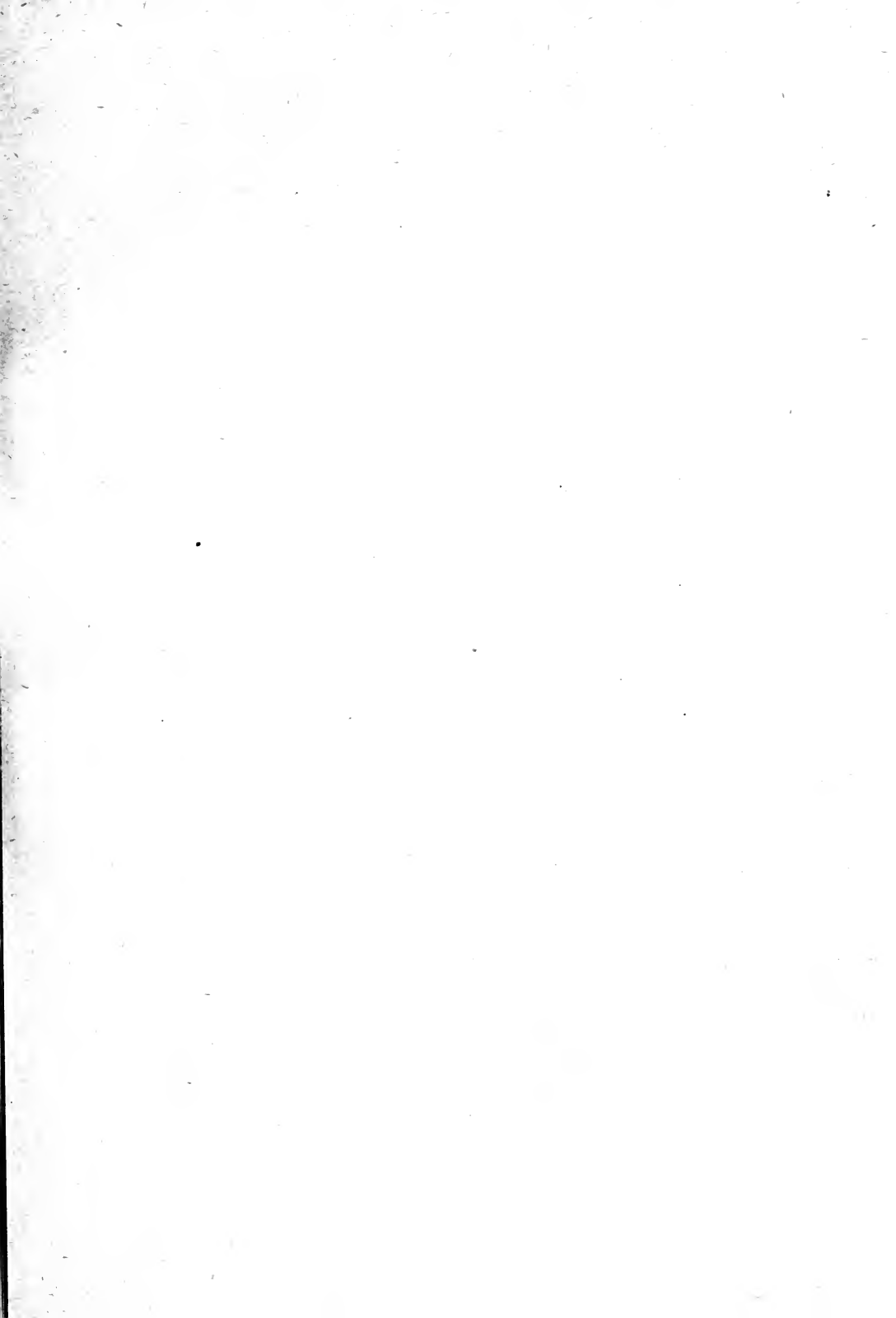
Il Medeghino's first care was to add to the strength of his newly-acquired castle, and he set himself to work to complete the already imposing fortifications begun by Marshal Trivulzio some years previously. To the original fortress, and to the second group of fortifications constructed by Trivulzio, he added a third yet more massive stronghold at the extreme summit of the rock. A double line of battlemented walls of huge thickness sprang from the edge of the lake, and these lines were

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continued up the precipitous rock so as completely to encircle the three portions of the castle. Between these walls and the overhanging mountain a deep and broad fosse was cut in the solid rock, the bottom and side of which were protected by hedges of sharpened stakes and fences of naked steel blades. The towers and battlements bristled with armaments and artillery of the latest fashion. Access to the stronghold was possible by three entrances only; one by a gateway communicating with a subterranean passage hewn in the solid rock under the mountain, a portion of which is still visible; the second approach was by a steep, narrow track from the village of Musso, and the third by a road from Dongo, specially constructed by Il Medeghino to permit of the transport of artillery. It is related that not only the men of the *Tre Pievi* worked at the completion of these fortifications, but that also the women, with Il Medeghino's sisters, Clarina, and Margherita, afterwards the mother of St. Charles Borromeo, at their head, helped to render the castle of Musso impregnable both by land and water.

The disastrous defeat at Pavia, in 1525, of the French army, in which the French King, Francis I., was made prisoner, had its effect upon the fortunes of Il Medeghino.

The leaders of the Emperor Charles V.'s troops and the Duke of Milan soon began to quarrel among themselves, and with his usual acuteness Il Medeghino prepared to benefit by the situation their differences were likely to create. The Marquis of Pescara, the



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Emperor's lieutenant and representative in Italy, obliged the Sforza to give up his territory, leaving him only the castles of Milan and Cremona. The Pope, Clement VII., and the Venetian State were alarmed at this action, and fearing lest the Emperor intended to lay hands on the whole of Italy, formed an Italian league in conjunction with France against him. Il Medeghino believed this to be a favourable opportunity to enlarge his little domain of Musso, and seized the rich lands of Morluzzo, a territory belonging to the Bentivoglio family in the Brianza. After holding it for some time, he suffered the one defeat of his life in an encounter with the Imperial troops under Leyva at Carate, where he saved his life by leaping his horse over a waggon standing across the road and escaping to Musso. Thence he reappeared on the Larian waters with a powerful fleet and harried the neighbourhood of Como and Lecco. Lecco was at that time governed by a Spanish general, Villaterelo, of the Imperial army, who determined to seize the castle of Musso and put an end to the piratical inroads of Il Medeghino. He confided his plans to a prisoner in his charge, one Sardo, sending him to Musso as a spy, and promising him release and a free pardon from the Emperor should he return to Lecco with a plan whereby the Spanish troops might enter the fortress and obtain possession of it.

Sardo went to Musso accordingly; but no sooner was he there than he disclosed Villaterelo's designs to the Medici, who promptly laid his plans to entrap the Emperor's general.

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Sardo was sent back to Lecco, after having duly arranged the following scheme with Il Medeghino.

Villaterelo was to be assured by his spy that on a certain day the Medici would leave Musso for Bormio in order to take a course of the famous baths in that place. A few soldiers only, he was to be told, would remain within the walls of the castle, and these Sardo had already bribed to open the gates to the Spaniards. On their successful entry into the keep of the fortress, a cannon was to be discharged as a signal to a sailing vessel following the fleet bearing the Spaniards, and this vessel was immediately to make sail for Lecco and acquaint the Governor that Musso was his.

Villaterelo eagerly jumped at the scheme. On the appointed date, boats filled with armed men, under the command of the general's brother, rowed under cover of the darkness to Musso; it having been previously ascertained through spies that Il Medeghino had indeed departed with a large escort to Bormio. All went as Sardo had promised. At a given signal from the Spaniards the gates were opened to them, and in single file, owing to the narrowness of the steep approach to the keep, they entered the inner walls of the fortress. The gates were closed behind them, and presently the boom of the cannon sounded, conveying the welcome intelligence to the sailing vessel lying in the middle of the lake that the impregnable castle of Musso, the eagle's nest of Il Medeghino, was in the hands of the Emperor's troops. The vessel returned to Lecco, where Villaterelo was feverishly awaiting the result of his

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expedition. With joy he set sail himself for Musso to take possession of the fortress ; but at the town of Lierna, half-way up the Lake of Lecco, he received tidings that turned his joy into impotent rage. Il Medeghino had indeed ostentatiously left his castle with a train of armed followers and a quantity of baggage, as if for a prolonged absence. But he had returned secretly before nightfall, and as each Spanish soldier emerged from the narrow passage into the fortress he was cut down quickly and silently. When all were killed, Il Medeghino himself fired the signal gun which was to bring Villaterelo in triumph to Musso. In the meantime the Medici had caused the Lake of Lecco to be guarded by boats with chains stretched under water between them, with the intention of intercepting Villaterelo's fleet and allowing his own vessels to fall upon it. In the confusion that would follow, Il Medeghino had formed the plan of hurrying to Lecco and seizing the town, but the timely warning of the tragedy that had taken place at Musso caused the Spanish general to return with all speed to his headquarters.

Il Medeghino, however, eventually succeeded in possessing himself of Lecco, for he subsequently made friends with the Emperor Charles V., who officially conferred the territories and marquisates of Musso and of Lecco upon him, and these titles he retained till his death.

Having finally deserted the cause of the Sforza for that of the Emperor Charles V., Il Medeghino now

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devoted all his attention to acquiring fresh domains. He already possessed an armed fleet on the Lake of Lugano, and now aimed at possessing himself of the strongholds on Lake Maggiore. He despatched one of his younger brothers ostensibly to visit his sister, Countess Borromeo, at the Borromeo castle of Arona. The Borromeo, however, proved too suspicious of their relative's objects, and never allowed the Medici to penetrate into their residence.

Eventually Charles V. came in person to Italy, and after concluding an amicable settlement of his claims with the Pope, Clement VII., was finally crowned at Bologna by the Pontiff as Emperor of the West. One of the conditions made by the Pope was the restitution to Francesco Sforza of the Duchy of Milan with its numerous dependencies. Il Medeghino hastened to Bologna and endeavoured to obtain from the Emperor a confirmation of the grants of territory in Lombardy previously made to him, but Charles V. resolutely declined to allow any alienation from the duchy lands within its borders. After this refusal, the Medici retired in indignation to Musso, where he fitted out large armaments with the object of attacking and seizing the city of Como. The Duke of Milan promptly declared war against him, and in conjunction with a Swiss army from the Grisons prepared to besiege the castle of Musso. Il Medeghino, in addition to his existing defences, placed a second large fleet on the Larian waters. This fleet, Missaglia tells us, "was composed of seven large vessels with three sails each, and manned

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by forty-eight rowers. Each of these ships carried cannon, the projectiles of which weighed forty pounds, with a hundred fighting men on board. Besides these vessels were many other smaller craft, and a brigantine of marvellous velocity."

Il Medeghino was accustomed to brave the most violent storms in this brigantine, on the sides of which was emblazoned the motto *Salva, Domine, vigilantes*, while from the stern floated the Medici standard with the golden balls on a red ground. The historian, Missaglia, from whose life of Gian Giacomo de' Medici we have largely quoted, was a contemporary of the hero, and states that as a boy he had frequently stood on the shores of the lake watching Il Medeghino battling with the storm and waves in his famous brigantine.

And now, after a lapse of nearly four centuries, war vessels, though of a very different build and use, again float on the waters of the *Tre Pievi*, carrying our thoughts back to the stirring days when Il Medeghino led his fleets out to battle against his many enemies.

Our space forbids us to enter into the particulars of the conflicts which raged round the castle of Musso between the troops and fleets of the Medici and the Sforza. Eventually an agreement was arrived at by which, in exchange for an annual sum of 10,000 gold scudi—an enormous sum in those days—and the title of Marquis of Marignano, Gian Giacomo de' Medici was to abandon Musso, and cede all his lands and armaments on the Larian lake to the Duke of Milan. The Duke was to grant a free pardon to Il Medeghino, his

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family and dependents, his soldiers and retainers, and to maintain and confirm all the sentences and ordinances passed by the magistrates and officials of the Medici during his rule over Musso and the *Tre Pievi*.

We take the following account of the final departure of Il Medeghino from the castle he loved so well from the pages of Rebuschini :—

“The Medici, who betrayed evident signs of grief, prepared to abandon the spots which had been so dear to him, and when his eyes fell upon his people standing round him, and upon the armaments of the castle of Musso which he had formed with such care and labour, he burst into tears. It would be vain to attempt to describe in fitting words a scene so moving and pathetic. On one side lay the fleet with sails set for departure, having on board all the effects of the Marquis, and all his servants and people. The last, being Pievesi, stood on the decks with their arms outstretched towards their native shores, which they were obliged to abandon. On another side an immense crowd of people thronged the shores, sadly contemplating the transport on to the vessels of the last relics of that precious liberty which they had acquired at such cost and sacrifice, and which had been maintained for them up to that hour, loudly proclaiming their grief at being deserted by a captain for whom they had so often fought, and who had frequently led them, through so many perils, to victory.

“A restless going and coming from the shore to the ships, and from the ships to the shore, the mournful farewells between those about to leave and those remaining

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behind, in short a general outburst of sorrow when the final signal was given to the vessels to weigh anchor, rendered this departure a sad and touching spectacle ! ”

But the untameable spirit of Il Medeghino was to blaze forth once more before he finally abandoned Musso. Scarcely had his vessel begun to move away from the shore when the Swiss mercenaries of the Sforza made a rush on the castle with the intention of sacking it. Furious at the indignity, and at the sight of invaders within the walls of his beloved fortress, the Medici ordered the ship to go about, and made as though he were about to land and attack the foreigners. The cowardly Swiss fled instantly, nor did they venture again to show themselves until the fleet bearing the Medeghino had disappeared from view.

This event took place in March 1532 ; and we know few scenes in mediæval history more dramatic or which appeal more vividly to the imagination than the departure of the great Medici from the castle of Musso, which he had made a terror to Lombardy and a thorn in the flesh of the Emperor, Pope, and sovereign princes for sixteen years.

After leaving Musso, Il Medeghino placed his services at the disposal of the Duke of Savoy. Afterwards he went to Spain, and was sent by Charles V. to suppress the rebellion which broke out against the Emperor in the Netherlands, and afterwards to Hungary, where he fought against the Protestants. He was subsequently appointed Viceroy of Bohemia, and died at Milan on the 8th November 1555, in his

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sixtieth year. His obsequies were celebrated in the Cathedral with great pomp, and his remains were buried at Marignano, whence, by order of his brother, Pope Pius IV., they were again removed, in 1562, to the Duomo of Milan, and placed in the magnificent tomb prepared for them by the Menaggio sculptor, Leone Leoni, at the command of the Pope.

Missaglia and other commentators describe Gian Giacomo de' Medici as being a man of medium stature, broad-chested and of pallid but good-humoured countenance, and possessed of a keen and searching glance. He dressed simply and had an extremely courteous demeanour. He was vigilant and observant of every detail, and slept scarcely at all. Although capable of severity against any omission in military discipline, which sometimes amounted to cruelty, he seems to have been adored by his soldiers and dependents, as well as by his family. Unlike most of his generation, he despised the pleasures of the senses, and was of an extreme temperance. He gave largely of his riches to charity and to the encouragement of art. Throughout his life he never spoke Italian, but invariably used the Milanese dialect—"Il pretto Milanese senza artificio alcuno di parole."

Cesare Cantù writes of him as follows :—

"Pirate, king, brigand, liar, rebel, assassin, hero, he furnishes us with a picture of some adventurers of our own times."

This is in a great measure a true verdict; but we

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venture to doubt if among the sordid political adventurers of our own times—among the petty lawyers, money-lenders, and journalists who govern modern Italy—there is any adventurer so remarkable, so picturesque, and in some ways so attractive as Il Medeghino.

CHAPTER IV

THE LAKE OF COMO

Dongo—Types of Greek beauty—Brenzio and its frescos—An original reason for the good looks of the Brenziesi—A girl soldier—Gravedona—Frederick Barbarossa and the Gravedonesi—The *Schifo*—Cardinal Gallio and his Palace—The Churches of Santa Maria del Tiglio and San Vincenzo—The Inquisition at Gravedona—A canonised murderer—Domaso—Trout fishing, and shooting—The Piano di Spagna—The Fortress of Fuentes—The Lago di Mezzola—Colico.

THE little town of Dongo, which lies behind the point occupied by the ruins of the castle of Musso, has long ago lost the importance it formerly possessed as one of the three *borghi* of the Tre Pievi. It is now chiefly interesting for its iron mine, which was discovered and first worked as far back as the year 1465. If we are to believe the mediæval historians, iron was the least precious of the objects taken from the mountain sides above Dongo. Rebuschini alludes to rubies and emeralds being found in such quantities and of such bulk that even columns and tables were made of them! And indeed, in the archives of the Trivulzio family of Milan, are ancient documents mentioning that certain

HYDRANGEAS, ISOLA BELLA,
LAGO MAGGIORE



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tables made of these precious stones were sold by the inhabitants of Dongo to the Duke Maria Filippo, Visconti of Milan, for enormous sums. Needless to say, no trace of such gems is to be found in these days, and it is tolerably certain that the names of ruby and emerald were locally bestowed upon a kind of red spar and green serpentine marble respectively, as both exist in considerable amount in the rock strata in the neighbourhood of the iron mines. Some of the villages above Dongo, situated in magnificent scenery, are interesting from their great antiquity; and here, as in other parts of the Comasco district, types of Greek beauty are to be found among the peasants and the people generally—a survival no doubt from the Greek colonists whom Julius Cæsar encouraged to settle in the province. It is not uncommon to meet with a young peasant or fisherman whose form and features are those of a Greek statue, and whose manner and bearing to a stranger seem to be the natural accompaniments of his good looks.

Indeed, in the remote villages of Brenzio, the people are so remarkable for their beauty of form and figure, that a story is told of a great artist who visited the place for the purpose of seeing the frescos in the parish church, which were presented by Bianchi about the year 1628, and by Della Rovere, known as Il Fiamenghino, and of which the Brienziensi were always so proud that their fellow Pievesi, belonging to other parts of the little Republic, were wont to laugh at them in the saying “Prima Brenzio poi Roma”—thus

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relegating Rome to the second place in the artistic world.

The artist in question was so struck by the physical beauty of the men whom he met in the neighbourhood of Brenzio that, after inspecting the frescos in the church, he is said to have observed that he now understood how the Brenziesi came to be endowed with such faces and forms. It could be due to nothing else, he declared, than the natural result of their mothers', when in *uno stato interessante*, having constantly had the figures in the frescos before their eyes while attending mass. The parish church of Brenzio is well worth a visit, even from those who have no cause to anticipate any such after effects of a careful inspection of the remnants of the Fiamenghino and Bianchi paintings on its walls as those suspected by the above-mentioned artist.

Scattered over the mountain sides are numbers of detached buildings, often nearly concealed by foliage in the spring and summer months, and which many who notice them believe to be cow-byres. They are, as a matter of fact, entrances to many natural caverns in which wine and other materials needing an equable temperature are stored. In summer these *crotti*, as they are called, are delightfully cool, and sometimes even icily cold; while in winter they are warm and dry.

Dongo has been the birthplace of more than one remarkable individual, among them the learned cardinal Michele Ricci. But probably its most original native was a young girl belonging to the noble family of

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Scannagatta, whose father filled several official posts in the early part of the last century. This young lady was educated in a monastery, and afterwards in a military college. She entered the army, fought in several actions, and rose to the rank of lieutenant. Upon her sex being discovered, she was discharged, but was given a pension in recognition of her services. Eventually she married a Major Spini, after which we are unable further to trace her career.

An excursion to Gravedona, the next place of any special interest after leaving Musso, is one that is almost obligatory upon any visitor to the northern shores of the Lake of Como. The town is of very ancient origin, and the examples of architecture and early mediæval art which it contains are well known.

As the capital city of the Republic of the Tre Pievi, Gravedona held an important position in Lombardy during the tenth and eleventh centuries, and, indeed, down to the final incorporation of the Republic with the Duchy of Milan. Its castle, built upon a rock dominating the town and bay, was probably second in strength to those of Musso and Corenna only. That the inhabitants of the town and its surrounding district must have been a strong and independent race is evident from the manner in which they ventured to treat the great Emperor Frederick Barbarossa in the year 1178.

Intelligence having reached the Tre Pievi that the spoils taken by Frederick in Italy were to be despatched to Germany by way of Como and Lario, the people of

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Gravedona determined to intercept the convoy. They fell upon the Emperor's troops and galleys escorting the precious booty robbed from countless Italian cities, and possessed themselves of the entire quantity.

Rebuschini states that the value and amount of this booty was incredible. Precious works of art, rich tapestries, gold and silver plate, a royal diadem studded with precious stones, horses, arms of all kinds, tents, marvellously wrought suits of armour, all fell into the hands of the Pievesi, who promptly discarded their own worn armour and other implements for the more luxurious accoutrements of the Imperial troops. The royal crown was carried in triumph and presented to the church of San Giovanni Battista.

It is scarcely to be wondered at if the Emperor was annoyed ; for, after having subdued and sacked Italy, to meet with defeat and loss of treasure at the hands of the inhabitants of a tiny republic must have been peculiarly mortifying. That the blow rankled is clear. For when the preliminaries of peace were being discussed between the Lombard League and the Imperial Power, and the State of the Pievi was included in the list of those governments and cities which should take the oath of allegiance to the Emperor, Barbarossa is said to have exclaimed :—

“Perdono a tutti, fuorchè ai perfidi Gravedonesi !”

Those interested in the vicissitudes of Gravedona and the Tre Pievi will find much valuable information concealed under as much satire and bombastic exaggeration in a work written during his imprisonment in the castle

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of Fuentes by Antonio-Stampa, and entitled—*Storia dell' insigne Borgo di Gravedona, de' suoi concittadini, e delle guerre civili in essa succedute fino al 1725*, if they can light upon a copy of the book. And while upon the subject of works of reference dealing with places of interest in Lombardy, or Lombard history generally, we venture to recommend would-be students either to visit Signor Riccardo Gagliardi's library in the Piazza del Duomo at Como, where many rare and useful books are to be obtained at fair and reasonable prices, or to write for one of his catalogues, which he publishes several times in the course of the year.

Gravedona, like many other places on the Lake of Como, has produced its savants, men of letters, and politicians. Its leading "general" in its independent days was one Azzone da Rumo, who commanded the army of the Tre Pievi, and was killed in an engagement at the Isola Comacina. He designed the famous *Schifo* of Gravedona—a ship regarded in as sacred and patriotic a light as the *Carroccio* of Como, hereinafter to be described.

This *Schifo* was rowed by twelve oarsmen, and manned by twenty-four soldiers, all picked men, and chosen for past deeds of valour in the field. In the centre of the vessel was a huge crucifix, with an altar at its base on which mass was said for the combatants and for the dead, and from the mast floated the standard of the Tre Pievi—a white gonfalon with three red crosses emblazoned upon it. The wounded were taken on board the *Schifo*, and treated by the surgeons ; councils

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of war were held on it, and it gave the signals by which the manœuvres of the other vessels were directed during naval engagements. The loss of the Schifo was, as in the case of the Carroccio, looked upon as an ignominy and a national catastrophe.

The most imposing edifice at Gravedona is the vast palace built in the middle of the sixteenth century by Cardinal Gallio. This remarkable ecclesiastic was born at Cernobbio, near Como, of humble parents, and from a fisher lad became successively Bishop of Martirano, Archbishop of Siponto, Cardinal and Secretary of State to the Holy See, Duke of Alosto in the Neapolitan State, and Marquis of Scaldisole, a fief near Pavia. His estates and country houses were so numerous that he was said to be able to journey from Gravedona to Rome, a journey which at that time took over a week to perform, without ever being obliged to pass a night out of one of his own houses. Unlike many of his brother ecclesiastics, his generosity and munificence were unbounded, and he expended his vast wealth on the amelioration of the class from which he had sprung.

The great palace of Gravedona is a magnificent pile of buildings which can be seen from many miles distant down the lake. Square fronted, with massive towers at each corner, it is supported by huge buttresses and bastions which rise out of the waters of the lake. Its interior must once have been as splendid as its exterior is imposing. Cardinal Gallio bought the fief comprising the ancient Republican state of the Tre Pievi from



GRAVEDONA, LAGO DI COMO



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Philip II. of Spain, and proceeded to build for himself this magnificent residence. A mural inscription in the palace records his munificence to Gravedona in the following words :—

“ Ptolemaeus Gallius Cardinalis commensistium plebium Gravedonae, Surici, Dungi, Comes et Dominus, aeris temperiem loci amoenitatem sequutus oppidum nobile Gravedonam amplissimis aedibus, hortis, fontibus exornavit et nobilius reddidit.”

Unfortunately, since the Cardinal's days, his palace has repeatedly changed hands, and its interior is stripped of all its former magnificence. The stately proportions of the rooms, however, the great hall, and the apartments of the *piano nobile* opening out of it enable us to imagine what a princely effect the whole must have presented when the walls were hung with damask and silk tapestries, and the lofty chambers filled with works of art. A noble loggia, so spacious as to be rather a terrace than a loggia, access to which is given from the great hall, commands one of the loveliest views in Europe, and each of its graceful arches frames a natural landscape of surpassing beauty. It would be difficult, too, to find a more stately and at the same time charming apartment than the library. In the hands of a purchaser with plenty of money to spend, and good taste and knowledge to direct him in the spending of it, this palace might be made a thing of almost ideal beauty, and when wandering through its deserted and neglected rooms one cannot but regret that it should be destined in all probability to ruin or destruction. It could, we

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believe, be bought for a comparatively small sum, but nothing short of an American millionaire's income would restore it to its former magnificence and, at the same time, succeed in combining that magnificence with the requirements of twentieth-century luxury.

The subterranean parts of this great pile are extraordinary for their extent and for the massive walls and buttresses built into the rock. The visitor passes from one huge vaulted hall to another, and one of these is, or was so but recently, fitted up as a theatre by the present owner, who spends a few months during the summer *in villeggiatura* in the palace—a life, we should imagine, both healthy and romantic, but certainly not comfortable. A tradition exists, for which it is impossible to find any confirmation, that it was at one time decided to hold the sittings of that most disastrous gathering, the so-called Ecumenical Council of Trent, in Cardinal Gallio's palace. But a small portion remains of the ancient gardens at the back of the building; but even this is a picturesque and peaceful spot, delightfully cool in summer in the deep shade of lofty cypress trees; fragrant with the scent of roses, magnolia, and orange blossom, while the gentle splashing of water falling from moss-grown stone fountains falls gratefully on the ear. For ourselves, we would fain linger in this little garden, or pass the hot hours of the day alone with the past in Cardinal Gallio's deserted palace, rather than visit the ineffably dreary and ill-kept churches which are usually considered as the chief points of attraction and interest in Gravedona, and concerning which so many pages of

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learned disquisitions have been penned by archæologists and antiquarians.

No writer, however, on Larian subjects would be justified in omitting some description of the famous churches of Santa Maria del Tiglio and San Vincenzo, two small but very famous edifices which stand side by side in the midst of a grassy plateau on the very brink of the lake.

We are quite unable to enter into the numerous controversies which have taken place between archæologists, architects, and other technical authorities on the origin and early history of the building usually known as the Baptistery of Gravedona, but which is always alluded to in ecclesiastical documents relating to the diocese of Como as the Church of Santa Maria del Tiglio. It is probable that, in emulation of other well-known baptisteries standing apart from the church, this little edifice was used in later ages for a similar purpose; and the font, which occupies the centre, placed in its position accordingly.

By some authorities the church of Santa Maria is declared to be of unknown antiquity; by others its origin is traced to the tenth century, and by others again it is said to be of the twelfth century. All, however, seem to be agreed that it is not later than the last-named period. Local tradition, in which we confess to have greater faith than in the theories of foreign authorities, however expert, ascribes the origin of Santa Maria del Tiglio to the devotion and munificence of the Lombard Queen Theodolinda, whose history and

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connection with the Lake of Como we shall presently have to relate. If there is any foundation for the tradition—and it is remarkable how often tradition proves itself to be a more trustworthy guide than history—it would be necessary to go back to the sixth century for the origin of this curious little church.

Baronius and other historians refer to a miraculous event as having occurred in the church in the year 823, and more than one old French authority alludes to the alarm the portent occasioned to the then French monarch, Louis “the Pious.” Close to the high altar is a very ancient fresco, so ancient indeed, that even in 823 A.D. it is described as having faded from age—representing the Magi in the act of presenting their gifts to the Holy Child, who is seated on his Mother’s lap. It is recorded that, although the features of the Virgin and Child were nearly obliterated at the time, a miraculous light glowed upon them for two days consecutively, causing the faces to stand out in bold relief from the remainder of the painting. This fresco still exists, carefully preserved under glass—indeed it is almost the only object in the church which is carefully preserved ; the edifice generally being in a neglected and dirty condition.

In Street’s *Brick and Marble Architecture in North Italy* will be found a carefully compiled plan of this building, together with a detailed description of its architectural peculiarities, from a portion of which we may quote as follows :—

“It will be seen,” says Mr. Street, “that the dimen-

A GARDEN AT ORTA



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sions are small, the total external width being less than forty feet, whilst the design of the east end is most ingeniously contrived so as to give no less than five apsidal recesses.

“There are two stair turrets in the wall on each side of the western tower, which lead up to a sort of triforium passage, which is formed behind an arcade in the side wall of the church, and one of them leads also to the first floor of the tower.

“The triforium consists of an arcade of seven arches in each side wall. The small apses at the east have each their own semidome, and the chancel as well as all the other apsidal recesses are similarly roofed.

“All the walls retain traces of old paintings, the Coronation of the Blessed Virgin occupying the principal apse, and the Last Judgment the west wall. The whole church is built in white marble and black limestone, and in courses, or stripes, with extremely good effect. The roof of this baptistery is of wood. The baptistery is dedicated to St. John the Baptist.”

To avoid confusion, we may mention here that this church was originally dedicated to St. John the Baptist, but that from the end of the fourteenth century it is always alluded to in ecclesiastical and official documents, as well as by writers generally, under the title of Santa Maria del Tiglio. At what date, or for what object, rededication was resorted to we are unable to discover. It is certain, however, that under the Republic of the Tre Pievi, the title of Santa Maria del Tiglio was unknown; that of San Giovanni Battista being invariably

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given to this, the principal church in the capital of the Republic.

"Close to it" (the baptistery), continues Mr. Street, "stands the church of San Vincenzo, which, though Romanesque in its foundation, has been much modernised, and is now mainly interesting on account of the exquisite examples of late fifteenth-century silversmith's work which still enrich its sacristy.

"Conspicuous among these is a silver processional cross. The cross is nearly two feet across the arms, by three feet in height from the top of the staff. There is a crucifix on the one side and a sitting figure of our Lord on the other, figures of SS. George, Victor, and our Lord on the base or knop, and half figures of the Evangelists on the arms of the cross. The ornaments consist of crockets bent and twisted, of blue enamel filigree work, nielli and turquoises set in the centre of dark blue enamels. It is, in short, a piece of metal work which might well make a modern silversmith run swiftly down to the lake and drown himself in despair at the apparent impossibility of rivalling in these days such a piece of artistic and cunning workmanship, notwithstanding all our boasted progress.

"Not much less splendid is a chalice of almost the same age. It is ten and three-quarter inches, has a plain bowl, but knop, stem, and foot all most richly wrought with figures, niches, and canopies, and the flat surfaces filled in with fine blue and white Limogee enamels. The paten belonging to the chalice is very large—nearly ten inches across, and quite plain."

OLEANDERS, LAGO D' ORTA



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The crypt of San Vincenzo is practically the only remnant of the original church, which is said to date back to the fifth century. There are some early Christian inscriptions retained in the church, dated 508; but, except for their age, they are entirely uninteresting. Apart from their antiquarian and architectural interest, these two churches are depressing localities enough, and the lover of nature emerges from their doors with a sigh of relief at the welcome sight of the blue lake and peaceful mountains, at the touch of the warm, balmy air and invigorating sun after the chill and deadening atmosphere, physical and moral, of these sanctuaries.

Gravedona can boast of having been the scene of one of the abominable inquisitorial courts of the Middle Ages. In the thirteenth century a Dominican friar, known as Pietro da Verona, was made General of the "Holy" Office, and was sent to Como during the Pontificate of Honorius III., where he burned and tortured with merciless energy for nearly twenty years. The district was suspected of heresy, religious and political bodies and various reforming sects having established themselves in Lombardy. He held a Court of Inquiry at Gravedona, and caused many to be put to death or imprisoned for holding heterodox opinions, or for affording shelter to suspected heretics. So great were his cruelties that the people determined to assassinate him, and he met his just reward on April 28, 1252, when he was killed during a journey to Milan. This murderer was canonised by Innocent IV., and his

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body buried in the Dominican church of Sant' Eustorgio at Milan, under an altar upon which mass is said !

From Gravedona, continuing along the same shore of the lake, we come to Domaso, a small town of no particular attraction, and by degrees approach the head of the lake, where the clear, swift Adda enters it, to leave it again at Lecco. The fishing in this portion of the Lario is sometimes extremely good. Besides pike and coarse fish of various kinds, there are large trout, running to over twenty pounds in weight. Unluckily, however, it is rarely that these trout will rise to the fly ; they seem to prefer to feed in the deep water. In the Adda, however, trout of three and four pounds and over may be taken with the fly at certain seasons. The shooting also in these parts is, during the winter months, fairly good, especially the wild-fowl shooting round the Lake of Mezzola, and in the plain still known as the Piano di Spagna, on account of the great Spanish fortress of Fuentes which dominates the mouth of the passes and the Adda at the foot of the Valtellina.

Up in the mountains there are chamois and other bigger game. Much nonsense has been written by English writers on the subject of sport in Italy generally, and especially in the districts surrounding the lakes of Lombardy—nonsense similar to that which periodically appears in the columns of our daily papers concerning “tame” pheasant-shooting, “birds driven up to the muzzles of the guns,” and other contemptuous observations contributed by worthy individuals who would be

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as much "at sea" out shooting as a gamekeeper in the editorial offices.

The truth is, that many of these Lombard sportsmen, whose methods and customs are derided by foreign authors anxious to find padding for a chapter, are by no means the sportsmen *pour rire* they are supposed by our compatriots to be. Strength of limb, endurance, keen sight, a cool head and good nerve—all these attributes are, as a rule, possessed by the local sportsman whom the English tourist laughs at because he happens to see him shoot off his piece at a little bird. We should very much like to see the said tourist's face were the local *cacciatore* to take him an expedition into the mountains in search of chamois, gembok, or even of black game, hill-partridge, and hares. Some of these men are among the hardest and most daring climbers, the coolest and quickest shots to be found in any part of Europe, not excluding Fleet Street, West Kensington, and the London suburbs. To reach their game they will expose themselves to hours of fatigue, and often to danger of death from accident or exposure to the sudden storms which at all times of the year are apt to sweep over the higher mountain passes and valleys.

The Piano di Spagna is traversed by the military road which connects the Larian district with the passes of the Splügen and of the Stelvio—the last being the highest of all the great highways over the Alps. This plain, fertile and smiling in appearance as it is, has from the earliest times borne a bad name on account of

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the malarial fevers and other maladies to which its inhabitants have been subject during the summer and autumn months. Drainage and modern agriculture have done much to counteract its unhealthiness ; but it is still regarded as a fever-haunted district.

Even as late as the middle of last century, however, statistics taken in Como by the medical authorities of the province point to a condition of things scarcely equalled even in the Maremma or parts of the Roman Campagna. Doctor Tassani of Como published in 1860 statistics extending over the ten years from 1840 to the end of 1859, in which it was demonstrated that the average duration of life among the poorer inhabitants of the commune of Colico was only nineteen years and four months. Various plans were submitted to the Italian Government for the reclamation of the marshy land caused by the alluvial deposits after frequent inundations of the Adda, but very little was done until private landowners and local men of business took the matter in hand. The plain immediately around Colico is now fairly healthy, but much yet remains to be accomplished in the fertile but malarial Piano di Spagna which adjoins it. We have been informed that, strange to say, every effort on the part of the larger proprietors in this district to drain the soil, and so diminish the miasma rising at certain times of the year, met for many years with the liveliest opposition from the very peasants and agricultural labourers who paid with their lives for working upon it. The peasants feared lest their rich crops of hay and the

A TERRACE WALL, LAGO MAGGIORE



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pasturage for their cows should be ruined by drainage, nor could they be made to understand that they would eventually be the gainers by the innovation they opposed.

Of the Spanish fortress of Fuentes, which stands, rock girt, above the Piano di Spagna, little remains except picturesque ruins almost concealed among chestnut trees. The extent of these ruins, however, and the magnificent position occupied by the castle give sufficient idea of the strategic value and importance such a possession must have had in the hands of the Spanish Viceroy.

Fuentes eventually passed into the hands of the Austrians, and was finally dismantled and destroyed by a French force in June 1796, under General Rembaud. So massive and strong were its walls and bastions, that huge quantities of gunpowder were used to blow them up. In the immediate vicinity of Fuentes is the Lago di Mezzola, a weird and stagnant lake separated by marshes from the Lake of Como. Count G. Giovio describes a strange species of aquatic chestnut which grows, or did grow, for we have not ourselves seen it, though we have diligently searched for it, out of the waters of this lake. Its fruit is of triangular form, black in colour, and resembling a priest's biretta, and its large leaves spread above the surface of the water. Giovio asserts that the fruit is edible like the chestnut, and that in the year 1765 it was largely used by the peasants for food. Its technical name is *Tribulo aquatico*. Natives of the district and fishermen on the Lake of

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Mezzola do not appear ever to have heard of this plant. It is, of course, quite possible that since Count Giovio's day the *Tribulo aquatico* may have become extinct in these waters, owing perhaps to the drainage of the marshes.

The town of Colico, at the extreme northern end of the Lake of Como and on the opposite shore to Gravedona and Domaso, is the reverse of attractive. Indeed a more dreary and forbidding place it would be difficult to find, and probably the one desire of most visitors to it will be to leave it as quickly as possible. It is a place with some trade, however, and seems likely to increase rather than otherwise. In the meantime the inns and the food supplied at them are about as bad as, even in Italy, it is possible to find.

The wild flowers among these marshes, and also in the meadows surrounding the lake, are very beautiful. On the rocks pinks grow in profusion, and occasionally masses of red lilies stand out in vivid contrast with the grey stones among which their roots would hardly seem to find a foothold, much less a means of nourishment.

The Lake of Mezzola abounds in fish, and, indeed, the population on its shores exist almost entirely on the proceeds of their nets. The Adda, which flows into the Lake of Como on the other side of the marshes separating the two lakes, contains splendid trout, and these in early spring and autumn will rise to the fly. The extreme rapidity of the stream, however, is against the fly-fisherman, as the fly is carried too swiftly over the spots where trout might be expected to lie, and the most

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likely way to get hold of a fish is to allow the flies to sink well under the surface.

The head of the Lake of Mezzola is exceedingly fine. The precipitous crags which guard the entrance to the Val Bregaglia rise to a great height from the waters, while above the eastern shore towers Monte Legnone, perhaps better seen from this spot than from the Lake of Como itself.

CHAPTER V

THE LAKE OF COMO

Piona and its cloister—The Castle of Corenno—Bellano—Varenna—Queen Theodolinda—The Iron Crown of Lombardy—Esino—The Fiume di Latte—Some theories as to its peculiarities.

RETURNING from Colico by the eastern shore of the Lake of Como, the first place of interest we come to is Piona, with its bay almost cut off from the main body of the lake by a promontory, and called the Lago di Piona. Hidden away in this isolated spot is a tiny but most picturesque cloister belonging to a monastery long since disappeared, the period of which is thirteenth century. This quaint building stands but a hundred yards or so from the shore, by the side of some cottages almost as neglected in condition as itself. Should the lake happen to be rough, the process of landing is not easy, as jagged rocks threaten to damage the boat as it approaches the stony beach.

The cloister of Piona is built in the form of a quadrangle, to which the uneven numbers of the columns surrounding it give a curiously irregular effect. The arches between these columns are composed of marble,

IL CHIOSTRO DI PIONA, LAGO DI COMO



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granite, and bricks, evidently taken by the builders from some old Roman masonry.

The capitals of the columns are roughly carved, with various heads, birds, and acanthus leaves mingling in the design. Unfortunately, this curious little cloister seems to be totally neglected, and it is perhaps a marvel that it should have survived so long.¹ Comparatively few people visit Piona, since the only way of getting there comfortably is in a small boat or launch, and this particular part of the lake is apt to be very rough occasionally, even in the summer months, owing to the wind, locally termed *Breva di Lecco*, which blows from the Lago di Lecco with considerable force, causing the lake to "get up" very quickly into a heavy sea. The original church at Piona to which this monastery was attached was founded by Agrippinus, Bishop of Como, early in the seventh century. It was, however, totally destroyed to make room for the existing uninteresting building; but the monks who destroyed it happily spared the cloister.

Situated at a short distance above the lake near Piona is a square building with a handsome open loggia. This was the fortified "Custom-house" of Il Medeghino, who thus was enabled to intercept vessels passing along the eastern shore of the lake, and levy dues upon their cargoes.

We now come to one of the most delightful spots

¹ Since the above was written, the Italian Government has taken over the cloister of Piona as a national monument, and steps are to be taken to preserve it.

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on the Lario—the Castle of Corenno. Very little seems to be known of the early history of this fortress, but it is by no means improbable that tradition is correct in declaring it to be the site of a Greek settlement, and in deriving the name Corenno from the ancient Corinth—a name bestowed upon it by the Greek colonists from a fancied resemblance to the Corinthian Acropolis.

And indeed the rock on which Corenno stands might, on a miniature scale, have reminded the Greeks of their far-off Acropolis dominating its blue gulf.

It would be hard to find a more picturesque scene than this brown rock, clothed with grey olives and the dark green of the wild figs, surmounted by its brown ruined towers and battlemented walls. Under the shade of these walls we may pass the hot hours of a summer day pleasantly enough—all the more pleasantly, perhaps, because there are no stock “sights” to interrupt our idleness with the tiresome thought that we ought to be improving our minds; no works of art to be inspected, or historical events to be learned; only the blue lake at our feet to gaze upon, the blue sky framed in the olive branches over our heads, and the drowsy chirping of the *grilli* or the notes of a nightingale singing to his sitting mate soothing our ears.

The town of Bellano is the next place of any importance on the eastern shore of the lake. It is a place of considerable trade, with large silk factories, and stands at the entrance to the Val Sassina. The Visconti of Milan were lords of Bellano in the fourteenth century,



CORENNO, LAGO DI COMO



TO THE
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and their coat-of-arms—the serpent swallowing the child—is to be seen in various parts. Giovio mentions that Azzone Visconti built the port of Bellano in the early years of the fourteenth century.

As the Visconti arms are so common an object in the Comasco district, it may be mentioned that the family tradition ascribes their origin to Ottone Visconti, who, in the first Crusade, killed a giant whose shield bore a device representing a dragon in the act of swallowing a naked child. This incident is alluded to by Tasso in the *Gerusalemme Liberata*. Tourists are taken to Bellano to see the *Orrido*—a waterfall issuing from the lofty rocks of the Val Sassina. It is not, however, nearly so interesting a fall as that of the Fiume di Latte, to which we shall presently come. Bellano itself is a glaring and unattractive town, containing little to arrest the attention.

• Varenna, on the contrary, the next little town of any size, is full of interest, both natural and historic. It occupies an unique situation for the beauty and the extent of the view to be seen from its shore, and from the woods and vineyards above it on the mountain-sides.

As Bellano, exposed to the north, loses the sun in winter, so Varenna, facing due south, basks in its rays from early morning to evening during the greater part of the year. Hence an old couplet which runs thus :—

Vada, chi vuol provare pene d' Inferno
D' està a Varenna, ed a Bellan' d' inverno ;

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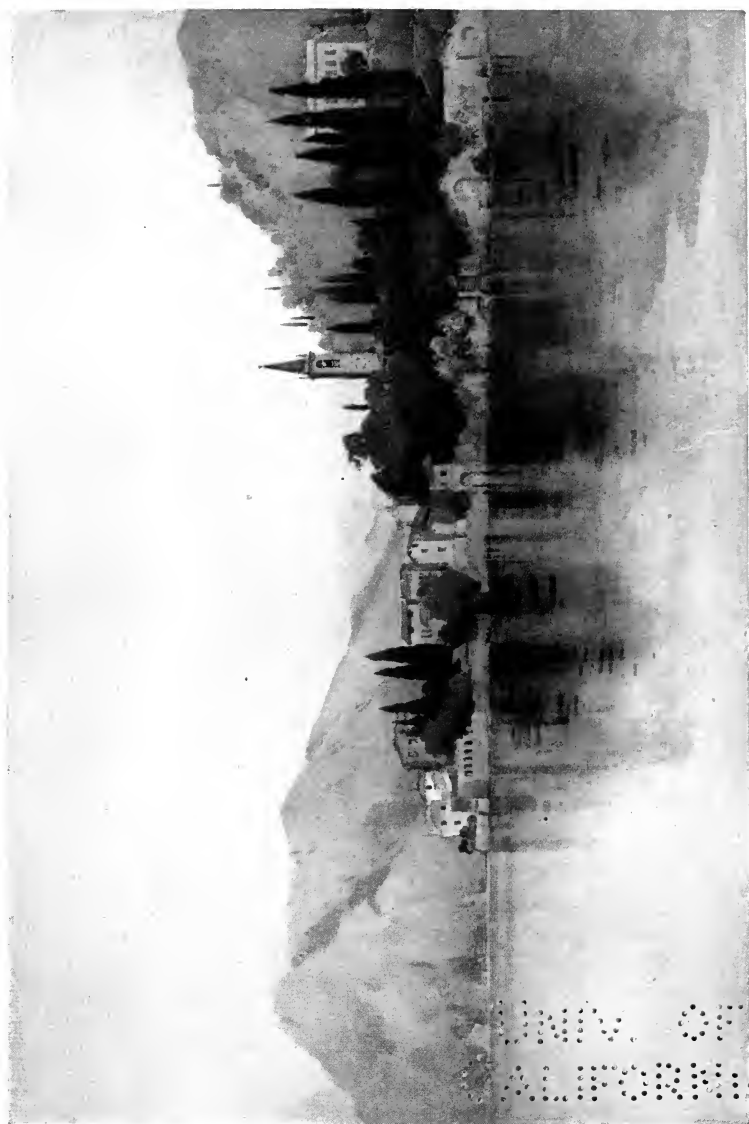
which, being interpreted, means :—

Let him who wishes to experience the pains of hell go in summer to Varenna and in winter to Bellano.

The solitary tower crowning the wooded hill beneath which nestles the little town of Varenna is the last remnant of a castle in which the Lombard Queen Theodolinda is said to have passed the last year or two of her life. This princess was the daughter of a King of Bavaria, and the story of her marriage to Flavius, King of the Lombards, is pretty, and fairly well authenticated. In the sixth century the Lombard King, for political motives, asked for the hand of Theodolinda in marriage, and it is related that, being anxious personally to inspect the lady before finally committing himself to marry her, he accompanied his ambassadors incognito to Bavaria. So great were Theodolinda's charm and beauty that Flavius promptly fell in love with her, and the princess as promptly responded to his love. Their married life, however, lasted for a year only, for Flavius died suddenly, leaving his widow to reign over Lombardy. The Lombards were so devoted to her that they engaged to recognise as their king any prince whom she might choose to be her second husband. In course of time she married Agilulf, Duke of Turin, whom she converted to Christianity, much to the relief and delight of the Pope, St. Gregory the Great, whose independence the Piedmontese had more than once threatened by designs to march upon Rome. One of the most precious relics in Italy, and the most historical royal



VARENNA, LAGO DI COMO



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crown in the world, was the result of Queen Theodolinda's success as a proselytiser. St. Gregory sent her, in token of his recognition of her services to the Church, a fillet of iron brought by the Empress Helena to Rome, and, according to pious tradition, made from one of the nails used at the Crucifixion.

This fillet of beaten iron was subsequently placed in a gold crown of Byzantine workmanship, which had already served on many imperial coronations. The diadem, which is carefully preserved in the Treasury of the Cathedral at Monza, is the famous Iron Crown of Lombardy. Notwithstanding the opposition of the clergy, the present King Victor Emmanuel of Italy commanded that it should be temporarily sent to Rome on the occasion when, after the murder of his father, he took his oath, and, wearing the Iron Crown, delivered his spirited and courageous speech to the united Italian nation.

Theodolinda's name is inseparably connected with the Larian Lake. She made the Strada Regina and other highways in this district, and founded many churches and institutions of piety and beneficence. She was the foundress, moreover, of the stately Cathedral of Monza, where many of her personal belongings are still preserved in the Treasury, and where she is buried. Curiously enough this great queen, who did so much in the cause of Christianity, and who seems at the same time to have been a beneficent and enlightened ruler as well as a saintly woman, was never canonised. Perhaps when we glance at the roll of mediæval extortioners

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and murderers who figure among the canonised saints of the celestial hierarchy, we may venture to suppose that Queen Theodolinda has not suffered much by the omission of her name from those to whom the Vatican has accorded the "honours of the altar." In any case, her body was expelled from its original resting-place near the high altar of the great cathedral she founded and endowed, and this by the order of St. Charles Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan, on the ground that she was not among the canonised, and her coffin was reinterred in the west end of the church. Tradition, as we have already said, has it that Theodolinda ended her days in the peaceful seclusion of her castle at Varenna, beloved by her people and doing good to all around her.

A beautiful walk, or ride, can be taken from Varenna up the Val Esino, through chestnut and walnut groves, deep ravines and secluded upper valleys and pasture lands, to the village of Esino, where there is a fairly comfortable hotel ; and from here those who care for mountain climbing can make the ascent of Monte Codeno, or La Grigna,—whither, however, we entirely decline to escort them.

The parish church of Varenna possesses a singularly musical peal of bells, which are said to be largely composed of silver. Whether this be so or not, their tones are of a remarkable sweetness, especially when they ring out across the waters of the lake on a calm summer evening. Red and white oleanders flourish in great beauty in the gardens, owing to the amount of sunshine they get throughout the year, but Varenna for so

A DOORWAY AT VARENNA, LAGO DI COMO



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picturesque a spot is unusually destitute of any gardens worthy of the name, and its charms are to be found rather in the beautiful though rough walks in the woods and vineyards above it, whence magnificent views are to be obtained on all sides, than in the dusty and noisy little town itself.

A short walk or row from Varenna brings us to the curious waterfall called Fiume di Latte—the stream of milk—which is well worthy of a visit from those interested in natural phenomena.

The milk-white cascade bursts forth from a cavern in the hillside, some little distance above the shore, and thunders down a narrow and rocky channel into the lake. Except for the colour of the water, there is nothing at first sight remarkable in the fall. It is the intermittent nature of so large a volume of water that makes the Fiume di Latte of special interest. The discharge of water usually commences in March, and increases in size as the heat of summer approaches. This, of course, is easily accounted for by the gradual melting of the glaciers and snow on the higher precipices of Monte Codeno. But the peculiarity which Fiume di Latte shares in common with the mysterious spring of the Villa Pliniana, some few miles away, is that its waters are intermittent in early summer when the heat of the sun is melting the ice and snows in the highest altitudes of the mountains above. For apparently no reason, the waterfall which is one day a leaping torrent becomes suddenly smaller or almost ceases to flow from its rocky cavern, and as suddenly

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it will increase again to its former volume. Changes of weather have undoubtedly some powerful influence in producing this capricious ebb and flow. Another peculiarity that we have often noticed, though we do not find any allusion to it by Count Giovio or other authorities on Larian subjects, is that the sound of the fall varies considerably. This variety of sound does not, we are convinced from frequent observation—if the term may be applied to sound—depend upon the proximity of the listener to the fall, or to the direction of the wind, though it is possible, and even perhaps probable, that atmospheric conditions have much to do with it. Neither does it depend upon the volume of water issuing from the rock, for we have noticed the same differences in what we may call the tones of the water when the torrent has been in a very low state.

It may be worth mentioning that the same strange tone differences, for it is not a mere difference in the volume of sound, have been heard to proceed from the small mountain lakes of Caprico and Ledù above Gravedona, which before changes of weather have been known to alarm the peasants by their uncanny murmurs, which occasionally increase to a sullen roar, although their surfaces may be unruffled by any wind. On the whole, the theory that the Fiume di Latte owes its intermittent peculiarities only to the melting or freezing of the glaciers and snowfields of Monte Codeno does not seem to be consistent with established facts, since in March, when the waters first make their reappearance, the glaciers and snowdrifts are still

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unaffected by the sun's rays, except perhaps to an imperceptible extent during an hour or so in the middle of the day. Moreover, the torrent has not only been known to disappear entirely in summer, but also to descend in its usual summer volume in mid-winter, though this last phenomenon has not, we believe, been verified since the year 1796. The water of Fiume di Latte is of an icy coldness, so much so that fruit, meat, fish, or other perishable articles can be kept fresh in it for days in the hottest weather.

It is always remarked that the two Plinies, who so carefully noted and described every natural peculiarity of their beloved Larius, never allude to Fiume di Latte, although they discourse at length on the mysterious spring at the Villa Pliniana.

Count Giambattista Giovio accounts for the Plinies' silence in a way that is at once ingenious and probable. He observes that in their days the torrent was no doubt entirely subterranean, and that its subsequent outburst from the side of the mountain was due to some internal fall of rock blocking its passage and causing the waters to be forced to the surface of the earth.

CHAPTER VI

THE LAGO DI LECCO

IF the south-eastern arm of the Lake of Como, known as the Lago di Lecco, possesses fewer places of interest than the northern and southern portions of the lake, its scenery, though more severe in character, is scarcely less fine.

A Comasco popular saying, part of which, however, we must suppress as unsuitable for quotation, compares the Larian Lake with the figure of a man. In the dialect of the country the saying runs thus :—

El noster lagh' è come un uom'
C' ha un piè a Lech' e l' altro a Comm,
El collo a Domâs . . .

(Our lake is like a man, who has one foot at Lecco and the other at Como, his neck at Domaso, etc., etc.)

The Lecco arm, or, as the Comasco would have it, leg, is less frequented by tourists than the other parts of the lake, partly because, excepting the gardens in the Villa Giulia, there are no stock sights to be seen along its shores, and partly because its waters are apt to be rough, and small boats not infrequently are tossed up

VILLA GIULIA, LAGO DI COMO



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The Lago di Lecco

and down in a quite heavy sea. There is not, however, the slightest danger, under ordinary conditions of weather, when the boats are managed by professional boatmen who understand their lake, and know how to humour the waves, which sometimes appear to come from all directions at once.

The little fishing village of Pescallo, the first hamlet reached after passing the Punto di Bellagio, was the abode of Carlo Bellosio, a well-known fresco painter who was born in Milan in 1801. He began life as a plasterer, but showing a remarkable talent for drawing, was sent to the Brera Academy. His work soon attracted the attention of the Sardinian royalties, and the castle of Racconigi near Turin, where the present King and Queen of Italy are wont to spend some weeks in the summer, contains some very fine frescoes painted by him. His work is often to be found throughout the Milanese and Bergamask districts.

Lying in the midst of beautiful gardens is the Villa Giulia, now the property of Count Blome, a well-known Austrian, who passes much of the year here. It was originally built by the Venini family of Bellagio, and was subsequently bought by the late King of the Belgians, from whom it was purchased some years ago by its present possessors. Beyond the beauty of its position and the grounds by which it is surrounded, there is nothing remarkable about this villa. Portions of the grounds are shown to the public on certain days ; but although most courteous to his acquaintances, the owner does not encourage visitors. A

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certain well-known English peer, who had passed some time at the Villa Giulia when a boy as a guest, with his father, of the King of the Belgians, was recently in the neighbourhood. Wishing to revisit it, he sent in his card with a request that he might be allowed to walk through the grounds. After waiting some time, his card was returned to him with a message to the effect that Count Blome did not recollect having the honour of the Earl of ——'s acquaintance.

Limonta is a picturesque little place, celebrated for the size and flavour of its chestnuts growing in the neighbouring woods above. From here a delightful though steep walk may be taken by lanes and through olive gardens and vineyards, groves of chestnut and walnut trees, to Civenna, a beautifully situated village on the highroad through the Brianza district. The drive to Bellagio from Civenna is only equalled in beauty by the descent on to the lake from Porlezza already described in another chapter.

Vassena, another village beyond Limonta, originally bore the Etruscan name of Volsinia, and is described by Paolo Giovio in the sixteenth century as containing massive towers and fortifications, of which no trace now remains.

Across the lake, on the opposite shore, is Lierna, a thriving place, originally a Roman stronghold. Near Lierna are quarries of black marble, from which marble was taken to build the cathedral at Como. Above Duno rises the rocky Monte Regale. Mondello, a neighbouring village, was the fief of an ancient family



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who gave its name to the place, and which held it as a grant from Frederick Barbarossa for services rendered to him. The mountains about here are rich in lead and other minerals, and from a quarry near Mondello the eight great marble columns in the church of the Annunziata at Como were taken.

We pass nothing else of special interest until we reach the end of the lake and the town of Lecco. The trade of Lecco is very considerable, and there would seem at first sight to be no reason—unless the reason is to be found in the suicidal commercial policy of excessive protection insisted upon by the Italian Government—why the place should not be very much more prosperous and important than it is. It stands in the centre of one of the richest districts in Italy, and possesses every natural advantage for the facilitation of transport both by land and by water. Its silk factories and its trade in preserved and candied fruits are thriving industries ; but, as in every other Italian town, the weight of municipal misgovernment, of excessive taxation, of insufficient and ill-organised railway transport act as a brake upon all chances of permanent progress or expansion. The past history of Lecco is, for these reasons, more worthy of attention than that of the ill-kept and unattractive modern town.

Lecco was at one time an Etruscan city and colony. The Etruscans were succeeded by Celts, and these again by the ancient Romans, Julius Cæsar having made the place a military station. In the third cen-

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ture, A.D., St. Mona, Bishop of Milan, converted the Lecchesi to Christianity. For centuries subsequent to this period Lecco was more or less under the sway of the northern barbarians, the Rhætians, Gauls, etc. In 1161 the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, after destroying Milan, divided Lombardy into six provinces, of which Lecco, governed by an imperial viceroy, was one.

In the struggle between the Torriani and Visconti families for the dukedom of Lombardy, the Lecchesi embraced the cause of the Torriani, and Lecco was subsequently invaded by the Visconti and conquered. Azzone Visconti enclosed the town with high walls and towers, and built the magnificent bridge over the river Adda. This bridge, which was originally constructed in 1335, is well worth a visit. Azzone Visconti's bridge had only eight arches, and the remaining space over the broad river was occupied by drawbridges. It was guarded by towers at its extremities, and in the centre was a statue of St. John Nepomuc. It was partially destroyed by the French in 1799, but was rebuilt and enlarged by the Austrians soon afterwards.

The reader will find romantic descriptions, not only of Lecco, but of its surrounding dependencies, in Manzoni's famous novel, *I promessi Sposi*.

The Adda, flowing out of the south-eastern extremity of the Lake of Como, quickly forms two small lakes, those of Pescarenico and Garlate, charming views of which are to be had from Azzone Visconti's bridge.

VILLA SERBELLONI, LAGO DI COMO



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CHAPTER VII

BELLAGIO, CADENABBIA, AND THE TREMEZZINA

The Punto di Bellagio—Bianca d'Este—"Tragedy"—Villa Serbelloni—Bellagio—German manners—Villa Melzi—Villa Trotti and its owners—San Giovanni—A green grotto—A narrow escape—Anglers' tales—Lezzeno and its horrors—St. Charles Borromeo and the Inquisition—Nesso—Tremezzo—Villa Carlotta—Cadenabbia—Villa Maria—Boating on the lake—Monte Crocione—Lenno—Pliny's villas—The Madonna del Soccorso—The Balbianello—Villa Arconati.

VISIBLE from every part of the lake except the southern reaches nearer Como, the Punto di Bellagio rises abruptly out of the waters with its wooded promontory crowned by the Villa Serbelloni, now, alas, the annexe of an hotel, while behind it the town of Bellagio lines the shore, whence steep, picturesque by-streets climb the hillsides above the port and the row of hotels and shops facing the lake.

The point of Bellagio is, without doubt, the site of one of the younger Pliny's numerous villas, and precisely the one to which he gave the name of Tragedy,—not from any tragic associations with its surroundings, but because it was raised high above the surface of the

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lake as a tragic actor was raised by the height of the heels he wore to his shoes high above the stage on which he played. The explanation of the name seems to be as far-fetched as the name itself appears to be incongruous and unfitted to any residence built in so lovely a spot. The site of another villa which Pliny called Comedy is uncertain, but Giovio supposes it to have been at Lenno, and we shall reach its site later on.

Although it probably was so in the time of Pliny, who, unlike the degenerate Romans of the later days, was an ardent lover and protector of everything that makes the country beautiful, this promontory was a barren rock in the Middle Ages. Where the Villa Serbelloni now stands, a fortress, which was little else than a robber's nest, dominated the entrance to the Lake of Lecco, and was demolished by the Visconti. The land subsequently was part of the property of the ancient and noble Stanga family of Milan, who built a residence upon it, and from them it passed to Ercole Sfondrati, who commanded the Papal troops against Henry of Navarre. This Sfondrati planted the rock with trees, and it was for his successor that Paolo Giovio, the historian of the Larian Lake in the Middle Ages, wrote his *Descriptio Larii Lacus*, to which, and to his descendant, Count Giambattista Giovio, we are so much indebted for particulars of its history during those centuries and in later days.

After the Sfondrati family, the Punto di Bellagio became the property of the distinguished ducal house

BELLAGIO, LAGO DI COMO



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Bellagio, Cadenabbia, and the Tremezzina

of Serbelloni, one of the oldest families in Italy. The present Duke still retains it, though the villa and grounds are let for a term of years to an hotel-keeper. Simentio, who edited the first edition (1558) of Paolo Giovio's work, describes in enthusiastic language his first visit to the Sfondrati's estate at Bellagio, and his admiration of all he saw at the villa on the promontory—its spacious rooms, its gardens, its staircase of eight hundred granite steps leading from the lake to the summit of the wooded rock. Nothing can exceed the beauty of the view from the top of the Punto di Bellagio, and no words can adequately describe it. Faithful to our resolutions not to weary our readers with unnecessary repetitions of what must be, after all, rather word-painting than scene-painting, we can only recommend them to go to the summit of the promontory and look at the views through their own eyes and with their own understanding. At whatever time of year they may go, on the hottest day of summer, or on the coldest day in winter, under almost any conditions of weather—save, naturally, when lake and mountains are wrapped in mist or hidden in driving rain—they will have their reward.

In the year 1493 the Punto di Bellagio was the scene of a tempest in which a newly-married queen on her way to join her husband was nearly lost, together with all the bridal train. Bianca Sforza, daughter of the Duke and Duchess of Milan, had four days previously been married with great pomp and magnificence to Maximilian, King of the Romans. The bridegroom

The Italian Lakes

left his bride immediately after the ceremony in Milan, under the plausible excuse of repairing to Austria in order to arrange for her a suitable reception in his empire. On the fourth day after her marriage, Bianca d'Este started from the episcopal palace at Como, where she and her suite had passed the previous night, and embarked on a magnificent State galley, manned by forty rowers. She was followed by her train and escort, who occupied a fleet of thirty other vessels. Until Bellagio was reached, all went well, and the royal party descended at the castle of the Marchese Stanga on the promontory of Bellagio, whose guests the young queen and her suite were to be for the night. They had scarcely re-embarked on the following morning on their voyage up the lake when a fearful storm arose. The unlucky bride was tossed about on the waves for a whole day, and it was only at night that the galleys could return to Bellagio.

A vivid description of this episode is given in Mrs. Henry Ady's (Julia Cartwright) fascinating work on *Beatrice d'Este*, to which the authoress has justly added the sub-title of *A Study of the Renaissance*. It was, by the way, the young widow of the last of the Sforza Dukes of Milan, the Duchess Cristina Sforza, who when an offer of marriage reached her from Henry VIII. of England, wittily replied "that unfortunately she had only one head; but that had she two, one of them should be at the King of England's service."

The town of Bellagio itself is full of picturesque little streets and corners. It is, however, a place to



MONTE CROCIONE, LAGO DI COMO



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Bellagio, Cadenabbia, and the Tremezzina

which those who are really able to appreciate the charms of the Lake of Como are apt to resort for business rather than pleasure ; for not only is the town intolerably hot in late spring and summer after the early hours of the morning, but it is also tourist-haunted to a painful degree, the German element being particularly obnoxious. It is remarkable how the Germans have succeeded in making themselves detested throughout the length and breadth of Italy, but when one sees how they are apt to treat the people one is no longer surprised. Their rudeness, and the petty meannesses to which they will resort in order to get the fullest amount of work done for them in return for the smallest possible remuneration, make them unpopular in Italy wherever they go. The Italians will laugh good-humouredly at the eccentricities of the English tourist, and at the marvellous inability of the English generally to abstain from attempting to interfere in other people's affairs, public and private, in any place in which they may settle ; they will look on with amused curiosity at the self-satisfied swagger of the Americans, whom they are rapidly learning no longer to confuse with the English ; but the German makes them angry, and those who have quick ears may frequently catch the muttered expression *porco d'un tedesco !* as he passes.

Between Bellagio and its pretty *borgo* of San Giovanni is the Villa Melzi. The original builder and proprietor of this villa was Count Melzi, who held high official positions in Lombardy under the Emperor Napoleon I. A famous portrait of Bonaparte, as a

The Italian Lakes

handsome young man of thirty or so, is to be seen in the villa, and also a striking bust of Michelangelo executed by the great artist himself. A youthful member of the Melzi family, Francesco Melzi, was on terms of most affectionate friendship with Leonardo da Vinci, who left him the contents of his studio at his death. This youth accompanied Leonardo to France when the artist placed his services at the disposal of King Francis II., and was with him when he died. Frescos in the chapel of the villa record this friendship.

The gardens of the Villa Melzi are among the best kept of any in Italy, the present owner, the Duchess Melzi d'Eril, being devoted to them. A charming hostess, the Duchess is owner of large estates in Lombardy and Venetia, and a magnificent palace in Milan. She has, moreover, the reputation of being a shrewd woman of business, to which she attends in person.

San Giovanni is the site of another delightful villa, the Villa Trotti. The owner, the Marchese Trotti-Bentivoglio, is also, like his neighbour, the possessor of gardens of which he is very proud. In his case, however, his love for his garden is supplemented by profound technical knowledge of all branches of horticulture. Among the oldest of the Lombard families, the Trotti-Bentivoglio also have large and numerous estates. The Marchesa is a typical *grande dame*, of the type common to every nationality, beloved by all classes for her kindliness. By birth a Princess Belgiojoso, the Marchesa Trotti inherited from her mother, the well-

BELLAGIO FROM THE VILLA MELZI,
LAGO DI COMO



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known Princess Cristina Belgiojoso, the famous Villa Pliniana, which we shall hereafter describe. Throughout the Comasco district the Marchese and Marchesa Trotti are regarded with affection and respect, and well would it be for Italy if more of her great families had a similar conception of the duties and responsibilities attaching to the possession of high rank and large possessions. In the shady gardens of the Villa Trotti are to be found many rare trees and shrubs, the welfare of each being carefully superintended by the Marchese.

The church of San Giovanni, in the immediate vicinity of the Villa Trotti, is of considerable ecclesiastical importance, and great *feste* of the church are celebrated there with much picturesque ceremony. It possesses a peal of large and deep-toned bells, the sound of which can be heard at a great distance.

Beyond San Giovanni the mountain sides come sheer down to the water's edge for a considerable distance. A mile or so along the rocky shore is a curious grotto which, unless the lake be abnormally high, can be entered in a rowing boat. Inside the cave, which is covered with the maiden-hair fern, the light is of a peculiar green colour. Unfortunately, this grotto has recently been acquired by the keeper of a *laiterie* near by ; and, whereas it was free to all to enter as they chose, a franc is now charged by this individual, who has further vulgarised the place by closing the natural entrance in the rocks by iron barriers. The idler in a boat, coasting along the rocks in July, and looking at the fish basking in the sun-warmed water

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beneath them, runs a risk of an unpleasant surprise if, before approaching too close to the shore, he does not glance upwards to the grass land some way up the mountain above. The hay, after it has duly dried, is collected in small stacks like our north-country "stukes," each of which is weighted on the top by a large stone, or boulder of rock, in case a sudden storm of wind should blow the whole into the lake. When the hay is being removed, the peasants hurl the heavy stones down the slopes of the mountains, and these stones plunge into the lake hundreds of feet below with terrific force. Owing to the overhanging rocks, the peasants are often unconscious that any boat is passing, and on one occasion we were within a yard or two of being hurried into eternity by one of these boulders, our boat having hardly passed when we heard a rushing sound like the wind, and, with a splash that sent the water up high into the air, a huge stone fell into the lake just astern of us. The experience was a useful, but not a pleasant one, although the danger to our boatman and ourselves was over before it was realised.

Paolo Giovio, in his *Descriptio Larii Lacus*, dwells at some length on the enormous fish to be seen in the clear depths of the rocky creeks along this particular portion of the lake. According to this mediæval chronicler, trout of a hundred pounds in weight were no uncommon objects. He also describes other Larian monsters as existing, and frequently to be seen sunning themselves near the shores between San Giovanni and



A GROUP OF YUCCAS, VILLA MELZI,
LAGO DI COMO



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Bellagio, Cadenabbia, and the Tremezzina

Lezzeno—fearsome-looking creatures, these last—whose scaled skin no arms could pierce, and whose strength and weight enabled them to break through any net, however tough its meshes might be.

We have often looked for Paolo Giovio's monsters ; and though we have occasionally seen large pike and tench of more than respectable girth lurking, as the historian describes, in this part of the lake, we have always felt that one of our friends Messrs. Hardy's rods, and other tackle that they could supply us with, would be arms powerful enough to cope with these fish—if they would only "lay hold." As to the hundred-pound trout, we would very readily set up a house-boat on the Lario and flog the waters at all hours of the day and night with the fly, or troll with every known kind of bait, natural and artificial, could we but reasonably suppose them still to exist in the lake.

A very large proportion of an angler's life, however, is made up of thinking regretfully of things which might have been, and some anglers have even been known to persuade themselves, and to try to persuade others, that things actually were as they might have been ! We have sometimes suspected Paolo Giovio of being himself a fisherman.

Large trout, indeed, are plentiful in the Lake of Como, and are caught from ten to fifteen and twenty pounds weight in the nets. Unluckily these trout seldom or never rise to the fly, the water being full of small fish and other natural food many fathoms below

The Italian Lakes

the surface. The little fish called *agoni*, peculiar to all the Lombard lakes, are more delicately flavoured here than in other waters, and the Lake of Como abounds in perch, pike, tench, and other coarse fish, while a species of dace occasionally can be caught with the artificial fly. The Government has expended both trouble and money in the pisciculture of the Larian Lake, and laws, stringent enough on paper, but unluckily not sufficiently enforced by the local authorities, regulate the seasons for netting and the dimensions of the meshes of the nets employed.

At nights the soft sound of the cow-bells which the fishermen attach on floats to mark the position of their nets is particularly attractive, and very picturesque is the effect of the boats, gliding under the shores in the shallower water, with a flaring torch fixed in the prows, the light of which attract the fish, who are then speared by the fishermen. This practice, however, is somewhat a cruel one, because far more fish escape with an ugly wound from the spear than are actually brought into the boat. An inexperienced performer also runs no little chance of overbalancing himself when making a thrust at a fish and of falling headlong into the lake.

*A word, too, must be said concerning the abominable practice of destroying wholesale the bird life on the shores of the lakes, and thereby exposing the vineyards and the crops to the ravages of insects and disease-producing blight. The ignorance of the average Italian of the most ordinary rudiments of natural history is colossal. The landowner complains of the damage done

Bellagio, Cadenabbia, and the Tremezzina

to his crops by insects, and carefully does his best to exterminate the very remedies which Nature has ordained should counteract the evil. We are not one of those Englishmen who profess indignation and contempt at the "foreigner" who shoots a small bird with a gun. It is surely as legitimate for an Italian peasant to find his sport in shooting a blackbird or a thrush as it is for a British peer to find it in shooting a partridge. The Italian sportsman would prefer the partridge; but not being able to find partridges to shoot, he must perforce content himself with humbler game. It is not the man with the gun who does the harm in Italy, but the man with the fixed nets, in which thousands of birds are entrapped at all seasons of the year. It is incredible that the Italian Government, on economic grounds alone, does not rigorously prohibit all netting for birds in agricultural and vine-growing districts. This practice is exceptionally abused around the Lake of Como, and we have often heard more intelligent members of the community deplore the acquiescence of the authorities in a system so obviously detrimental to the land and its crops.

Rowing lazily from San Giovanni along the monster-haunted shore we shall come to the village of Lezzeno—

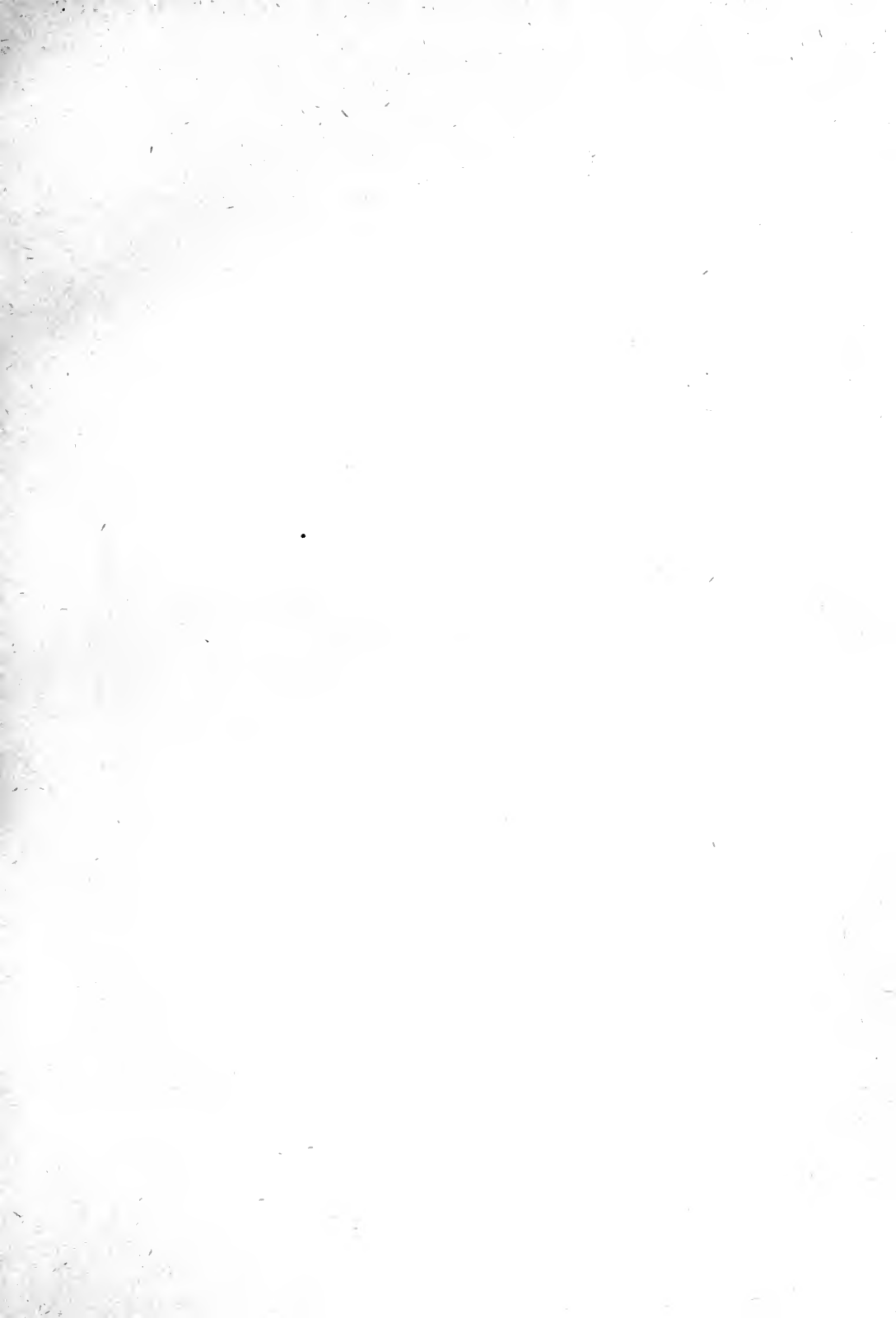
Lezzeno della mala fortuna
D' inverno senza sol', d' estate senza luna,

as an ancient rhyme aptly describes it; for owing to its position in the jaws of a rocky ravine under the spurs of Monte Primo, Lezzeno never sees the sun after the

The Italian Lakes

month of November, nor the moon throughout the summer months.

Lezzeno, too, has evil and tragic traditions. In the early part of the sixteenth century this village and its neighbourhood was supposed to be a stronghold of witchcraft and of the supernatural powers of evil. The Inquisition was at this period firmly established in the diocese of Como and the archdiocese of Milan, and its iniquitous machinery was in full working order. The barbarities practised at Como and at Lezzeno itself on the wretched victims denounced, usually for political motives, to the inquisitor at Como, as dedicating themselves to witchcraft and magic, surpass belief. Some of the tortures inflicted, indeed, were of so horrible and revolting a nature that we shrink from quoting the official documents of the period, in which they are unctuously described. Death by burning must have been a merciful punishment in comparison with others inflicted by these monsters in the name of Christ and His Gospel. There can, moreover, be little doubt that the absurd and fantastic charges brought against men and women of all classes were not believed to be genuine by those who made them or by those who investigated them. If an individual in those days were suspected of political or religious leanings to any party or religious body of which the Church was afraid, a charge of witchcraft was the easiest method of getting rid of him. Letters written to San Carlo Borromeo from the Inquisition at Como describe in terms of sickening hypocrisy the edifying end made by these unhappy victims to



ISOLA PESCATORI AND THE SASSO DI FERRO,
LAGO MAGGIORE



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Bellagio, Cadenabbia, and the Tremezzina

political differences and savage superstition. We cannot, when alluding to the part which this canonised archbishop played in such horrors, forget that St. Charles Borromeo first drew upon himself the favourable notice of the Vatican by the fervour of his letters to the Pope reporting the barbarous punishments he caused to be inflicted on certain Piedmontese heretics.

The late Lord Acton, in a volume of letters to Miss Mary Gladstone, published in 1904, describes St. Charles Borromeo as being practically neither more nor less than a murderer. Nobody could accuse Lord Acton of being anything else than a sincere and devoted Catholic ; and though we cannot be sure of the fact, we make no doubt that he must have had in his mind, when he wrote the scathing criticism on St. Charles Borromeo in the letter we have mentioned, the savage cruelties perpetrated under the "Saint's" jurisdiction, and with his exultant approval.

Leaving Lezzeno and its dismal traditions of the past, a delightful walk may be taken to Nesso by a path winding high above the lake, or the ascent of Monte Primo may be made by the energetic, from the summit of which there are lovely views over the Brianza district, and of Monte Rosa and the Alps. After leaving the chestnut woods clothing the lower spurs of Monte Primo, a charming pastoral country is entered—the Piano di Tivano, rich in luxuriant herbage, and in spring and early summer a garden of wild flowers. The village of Nesso, like Bellano, boasts of its *orrido*, the stream of which, leaping down through a narrow

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gorge of rocks hung with birch, oak, and wild fig trees, falls into the lake under a picturesque bridge of a single graceful arch. The village itself clings to the sides of the ravine, the brown roofs of its houses forming a pleasing contrast against the green foliage and dark rock.

Instead of pursuing any further the eastern shore, we must now retrace our steps and take our readers across the lake from San Giovanni to Tremezzo and the district known as the Tremezzina. Half a century or so ago, the Tremezzina no doubt deserved its title of the Garden of Lombardy. Of recent years, however, it has become somewhat too thickly populated, and so many new villas and houses have sprung into existence, that from Tremezzo to Lenno in the south-western corner of the bay is almost a continuous village. Above this coast-line of houses, however, the country is rich in vineyard and olive gardens, which extend for a considerable distance up the slopes of the picturesque Monte Crocione, the crags of which tower above Tremezzo and Cadenabbia. Tremezzo, and the Tremezzina generally, has the advantage of a delightful climate in winter, being completely sheltered from the north winds. Lemons, capers, and other fruits of semi-tropical nature ripen freely here, and the soil around this smiling bay, which recalls in miniature the Conca d'Oro of Palermo, is notoriously fertile.

The great sight of Tremezzo, of course, is the Villa Carlotta, which stands surrounded by woods and beautiful gardens between the little *paese* and Cadenabbia.

Bellagio, Cadenabbia, and the Tremezzina

This typically Italian villa was formerly known as the Villa Clerici. It passed into the hands of the Sommariva family, and on the death of Count Sommariva was sold by his widow to the Princess Charlotte of Prussia, who gave it its present name of Carlotta, and from her it passed to its present owner, the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen.

A simple but beautifully proportioned chapel of white marble, in the form of a rotunda, near the entrance gates of the villa was excluded from the sale of the property by Countess Sommariva. In front of this edifice is a little piazza overhanging the lake, shaded by lofty plane-trees, and commanding a delightful view. The interior of the chapel, in which mass is said on Sundays and *feste* by Don Bernasconi, the chaplain, is in as good taste as the exterior, and adorned only by pieces of sculpture, the work of good modern sculptors, such as Marchesi, Cacciatori, Tenesani, and Manfredoni. Four of the statues are likenesses of members of the Sommariva family, whose burial-place is in the vaults beneath.

Those who have the good fortune to make the acquaintance of that learned priest and courteous gentleman Don Baldassare Bernasconi, will find an informant steeped in the history, literature, and folklore concerning the province of Como and its lake. The friend alike of rich and poor, nobles and peasants, Don Baldassare Bernasconi is one of the best living authorities on Larian life, past and present ; and we trust that he will permit us to record in these pages our gratitude

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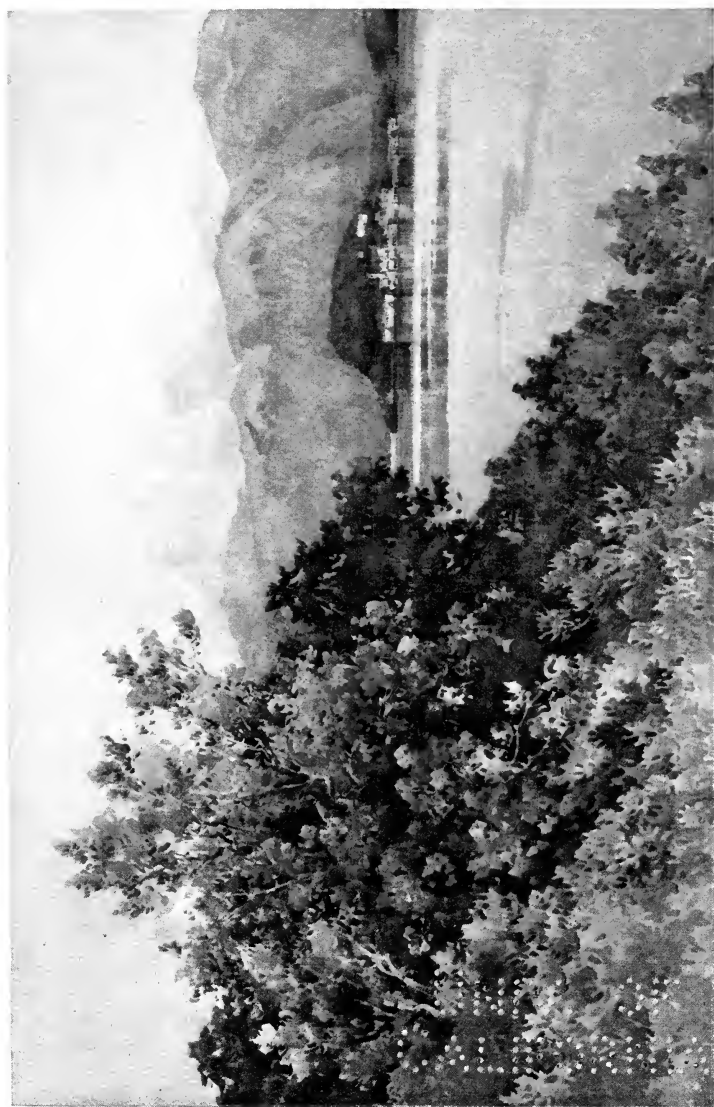
to him for the kindly help and encouragement he has afforded us in compiling the letterpress of this volume.

From the richly wrought iron gates, over the grey stone columns supporting which masses of crimson roses hang in luxuriant profusion, a double flight of broad steps leads up by myrtle-laden terraces to the *piano nobile*, or first floor of the villa, on which the reception rooms are situated. A fountain in front of this striking and picturesque entrance flings its waters high into the warm, flower-scented air.

Within the villa is a valuable collection of sculpture, including the original group of Cupid and Psyche by Canova, which, were we not wearied by the sight of bad copies in the windows of every vendor of sculpture and bric-à-brac in every town in Italy, might appeal to us more than it does. The *clou* of the Sommariva collection is undoubtedly the magnificent frieze sculptured by Thorwaldsen. This spirited and brilliant work of the famous Danish artist runs round the four walls of the saloon, and represents the triumphant entry into Babylon of Alexander the Great. It was executed by Thorwaldsen at the order of the Emperor Napoleon I., who intended to place it in one of the halls of the Quirinal in Rome. Before the frieze was completed, however, Napoleon was an exile and a prisoner, and it was due to the generosity and love of art of the Count Sommariva of the day that Thorwaldsen was able to finish it.

Cesare Cantù thus describes and criticises this frieze in his work on the Lario :

ROSES, VILLA CARLOTTA, LAGO DI COMO



To send
ADDRESS

Bellagio, Cadenabbia, and the Tremezzina

"The figures," he observes, "are not seen in the best light. There is some monotony in the attitude of the horses, who are all in the act of galloping or prancing. . . . Nevertheless, the detail is exquisite, and everywhere reveals long and accurate study of the antique. The two figures which close the cortège to the left hand of the door represent the sculptor and the patron whom death overtook before he saw the work."

The chief charm of the Villa Carlotta lies in its gardens and woods. In the months of May and early June the gardens are a dream of beauty. Masses of azaleas of every hue and colour, roses of every kind tumbling over balustrades, or falling from the stems of trees in a crimson cascade, greet the eyes at every point; Madonna lilies, giant geranium bushes—everywhere a wealth and a glory of colour. Magnolia trees laden with blossom scent the air; and a chorus of birds—thrushes, blackbirds, finches, and now and again the liquid notes of the black-cap—so often mistaken for the nightingale—provides a concert for the ears. On still moonlit nights the nightingales of the Carlotta challenge the nightingales of San Giovanni across the lake to a tournament of song; fireflies dance through the trees and flit to and fro across the sleeping flowers; and glowworms creeping over dark, mossy banks, or clinging to grey walls, show their lamps to light their lovers' way.

Lucky are those who can visit these gardens without being obliged to be herded round them by gardeners, in the company of tourists; for it is only by wandering

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through them at such times as the tourists are safely devoting themselves to the joys of the table d'hôte, or during the peaceful hours of a summer night, that their beauty and fascination can fully be realised. Fortunately for us, while attempting to describe them, we find that our lack of adequate language is atoned for by our collaborator's illustrations.

A shady avenue of fine catalpas, planted between the wall of the Carlotta gardens and the lake, leads to Cadenabbia.

The situation of this little place renders it a delightful residence, not only during spring, but also throughout the summer when Bellagio and other resorts on the lake become unbearably hot. The great spurs of Monte Crocione, rising behind Cadenabbia, throw a grateful shade over it after four o'clock on a summer afternoon. A greater luxury even than the shade in summer is the absence of flies and mosquitoes, and the pleasant certainty that windows can be left open all night without fear of attack by any of these insects, except for a brief fortnight in July, when an almost invisible kind of midge becomes troublesome.

But unluckily Cadenabbia may be said to have been annexed by the English and Americans ; and, like all such places in Italy, those who do not leave England in order to meet their compatriots and lead an English life, with all its drawbacks and none of its advantages, in a foreign country, will find it infinitely more pleasant and attractive out of the spring and autumn seasons

Bellagio, Cadenabbia, and the Tremezzina

than during them. Tea-parties and gossip, and an intensely British atmosphere of the type savouring of "evensong" and the parish magazine reign supreme in Cadenabbia at these times.

Much discussion has arisen as to the origin of the name Cadenabbia, and various ingenious explanations have been given as to its meaning and derivation. In mediæval days the hamlet appears to have been called in the Comasco dialect *Ca' de' Nauli*—in Italian *Casa dei barcajuoli*—and its present name may not unreasonably be supposed to owe its derivation to this local term—the more so, as the place has no importance of its own, being merely a *frazione* of the commune of Griante. The name Cadenabbia would seem to be a veritable Shibboleth to the British and Americans, who appear unable to acquire its correct pronunciation. "*Cardynabbyer*," or "*Caddynarbyer*," are the usual modes of pronouncing the name of this place adopted by our compatriots, and, strangely enough, even by those among them who return to the Lake of Como year after year. It is hard to say which method of pronunciation grates the more painfully on the ear.

Hotels and villas, these last the property for the most part of English residents, line the foreshore of the lake, nearly all of which possess charming gardens at the back. From the picturesque and admirably kept garden of the Casa Condé, belonging to Miss Oliphant, beautiful views of the lake are to be obtained, and notably of distant Varenna, framed—as it were—between

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branches of ancient olives and camphor-trees. In this favoured soil, trees, shrubs, and plants grow with miraculous rapidity, and those who purchase a piece of land and lay out a garden have the satisfaction of seeing their work arrive at perfection in an incredibly short space of time. The Villa Margherita, formerly called Giuseppina, possesses an interest in the fact that Giuseppe Verdi spent some time in it, and here composed the principal portions of his opera *La Traviata*.

The gardens commanding the most striking views, however, are those of the Villa Maria, the property of an American gentleman, Mr. Haynes. These extensive grounds, which only ten or twelve years ago were vineyards, are now covered by flourishing trees, shrubs, and flowers of every description, while a large space is devoted to the successful growing of delicious strawberries, peaches, nectarines, and other fruits.

The interior of the Villa Maria contains a valuable and interesting collection of fine specimens of old French furniture, one or two pieces of which would not be out of place in Hertford House. There are also cabinets stored with old china, miniatures, and *objets d'art* of all kinds. These were collected by the present owner's late wife, a lady who, possessing great wealth, devoted her life to the accumulation of works of art, of which she possessed great technical knowledge. Their present owner takes a keen and kindly pleasure in showing the contents of his house and gardens to those of his acquaintance who appreciate such things.

Bellagio, Cadenabbia, and the Tremezzina

The district of the Tremezzina, properly so called, terminates at the point of Majolica, occupied by the Villa Margherita mentioned above. After passing the Villa Maria there is nothing of special interest until Menaggio, which we have already described in a former chapter, is reached.

Cadenabbia is, of all places on this portion of the Lake of Como, the most adapted to making long excursions by water. The boats to be hired by the hour, day, or week are the best on the lake, and the boatmen, as a rule, are thoroughly safe and reliable, ready to spare themselves no fatigue or trouble in the service of those who treat them with proper consideration, while they may be depended upon as knowing the lake in all its many moods and caprices, and being able to forecast the weather with tolerable accuracy.

In this upper portion of the Larian Lake storms are apt to be sudden and violent, and the winds sweep down the mountain passes and valleys with great force. There are many signs, however, by which those who know where to look for them and how to read them can, in nine cases out of ten, receive ample warning of what may be expected in the shape of weather. The wind from Lecco and that from Como are not dignified by the term *vento*. They are fair-weather currents of air, locally called *Breva di Lecco*, *Breva di Como* respectively. The *Breva di Lecco*, it is true, often blows with force enough to raise very considerable waves. But it is a steady wind, and the lake plays no tricks under its influence. The north wind, the *Vento*

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di Colico, comes raging down the lake at times in violent and fitful gusts, and usually lasts at least twelve hours, and sometimes two or even three days. Its approach can quickly be detected by a dark line of breakers stretching across the lake from Gravedona to Corenno, and quick ears will detect the distant roar of the waves gradually becoming more and more distinct. Then is the moment to turn homewards and row hard, for the fatigue and wetting which will be the result of delay are not agreeable when there is no absolute necessity to encounter them. It is rather the unexpected summer storms, with thunder and vivid lightning, and sometimes large hailstones, which form a danger to the careless or unwary.

The worst of these are apt to come up stealthily from behind Monte Crocione, or down the Val Menaggio, and burst upon the lake in full fury at very short notice. The gusts of wind then blow in all directions, occasioning choppy waves and sometimes a sudden swirl in the lake which are not devoid of danger to a small boat. Accidents, however, are of so rare an occurrence as to be comparatively unknown, and if the amateur rower who does not know the lake intimately will resign his oars to his boatman and not attempt to display his superior English knowledge gained at Eton, Oxford, or Cambridge, he will meet with nothing more unpleasant than a wetting, and perhaps not even that. It should not be forgotten that boatmen, like mountain guides, are responsible for the safety of their clients, and that, should any accident occur, it is they who

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would be blamed and afterwards mistrusted. Few things are finer in nature than a bad thunderstorm in this part of the Lake of Como. By day the lake assumes the most vivid colours, now purple, now indigo-blue, now metallic green. The peals of thunder echo and re-echo round the mountains, so that one peal succeeds another without interruption; while at night a perpetual glare of lightning spreads across the sky, and outlines the jagged edges of the rolling clouds.

The boatmen of Cadenabbia have petrol launches, which can be hired at a reasonable price for making expeditions to Colico, Lecco, Como, and other distant parts of the lake. In settled weather this is a great convenience; but on stormy or doubtful days we personally prefer to trust ourselves to an ordinary rowing boat, nor would those boatmen responsible for the launches agree to take them any long distance in threatening weather.

A short walk through a lovely bit of agricultural country behind Cadenabbia takes us to the village of Griante, and this walk is worth taking for the extreme beauty of the view from the piazza in front of the parish church, which is also the parish church of Cadenabbia, the last-named place only possessing a Protestant church for the convenience of the foreign colony and visitors. To those wishing to make the ascent of Monte Crocione, we would strongly recommend departure from Cadenabbia on a moonlight night in late spring or summer, taking some provisions with

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them, and a guide in the shape of a trustworthy boatman. The effect to be obtained towards the dawn from the summit of Crocione, with the moonlight still falling on the Lake of Como, and the peaks of Monte Rosa and the high Alps tinged with the first rosy rays of the rising sun, is superb. The walk through vineyards and cornfields on the lower spurs of the mountain, through chestnut woods, over fresh dewy pastures on the middle slopes, and finally over smooth turf and across a broad stratum of rock at the summit is a delightful experience, if undertaken in the coolness and quiet of a summer night.

Above the road between Cadenabbia and Menaggio, and perched high on the rocky sides of a lofty crag forming a spur of Monte Crocione, is the little pilgrimage church of San Martino, whose Madonna is occasionally carried in procession when long droughts or long spells of bad weather threaten to ruin the crops of the district. The view from this church is superb, and inaccessible though the spot appears to be, it is easily reached in an hour's walk. There is a curious cave, also, high up on the mountain side, in the interior of which many fossils have been discovered. Its exploration, however, is not to be recommended, inasmuch as it contains a chasm of unknown depth. A piece of rock thrown into this grim hole can be heard thundering down its sides for two or three minutes or more, until the sound is lost in the bowels of the earth. This aperture probably has its communication with the lake. Another cave of a similar kind

ENTRANCE TO THE VILLA ARCONATI,
LAGO DI COMO



70 1944
Alfred A. O.

Bellagio, Cadenabbia, and the Tremezzina

exists near Tremezzo, in which there are fine stalactite formations, and a miniature lake.

The sunset effects to be seen from Cadenabbia are often of extreme beauty. The shadow of Monte Crocione creeps stealthily up the mountain sides above Varenna and Fiume di Latte, gradually changing them from green to deepest purple ; while above, for some time after the sun has finally set, the great crags of Grigna glow rose-red against the darkening sky.

Leaving Cadenabbia and its wealth of roses, the lower part of the Tremezzina can be comfortably visited by hiring a small boat for an afternoon. Below Tremezzo are many villas scattered along the shore, but none of any interest. In the corner of the bay formed by the Balbianello promontory, stands the little town of Lenno, where there are several curious relics of bygone times. Hidden away in a corner, and surrounded by squalid houses, is an ancient baptistery of considerable beauty, of early Lombard architecture, and which now serves for other purposes than that for which it was intended by its pious builders. Near the church is an ancient crypt, the columns of which probably belonged to a temple devoted to the older cults.

Not far from the shore, and between Lenno and the wooded promontory of the Balbianello, far down beneath the surface of the lake, can very occasionally be seen, or imagined, the remains of a Roman villa, and which Paolo Giovio asserts to be that villa of Pliny's called by its owner Comedy. Tragedy, as we know, stood on the summit of the Punto di Bellagio, and authorities

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differ as to the site of Comedy—though some agree in locating it at La Capuana, on the Serbelloni estate near that village.

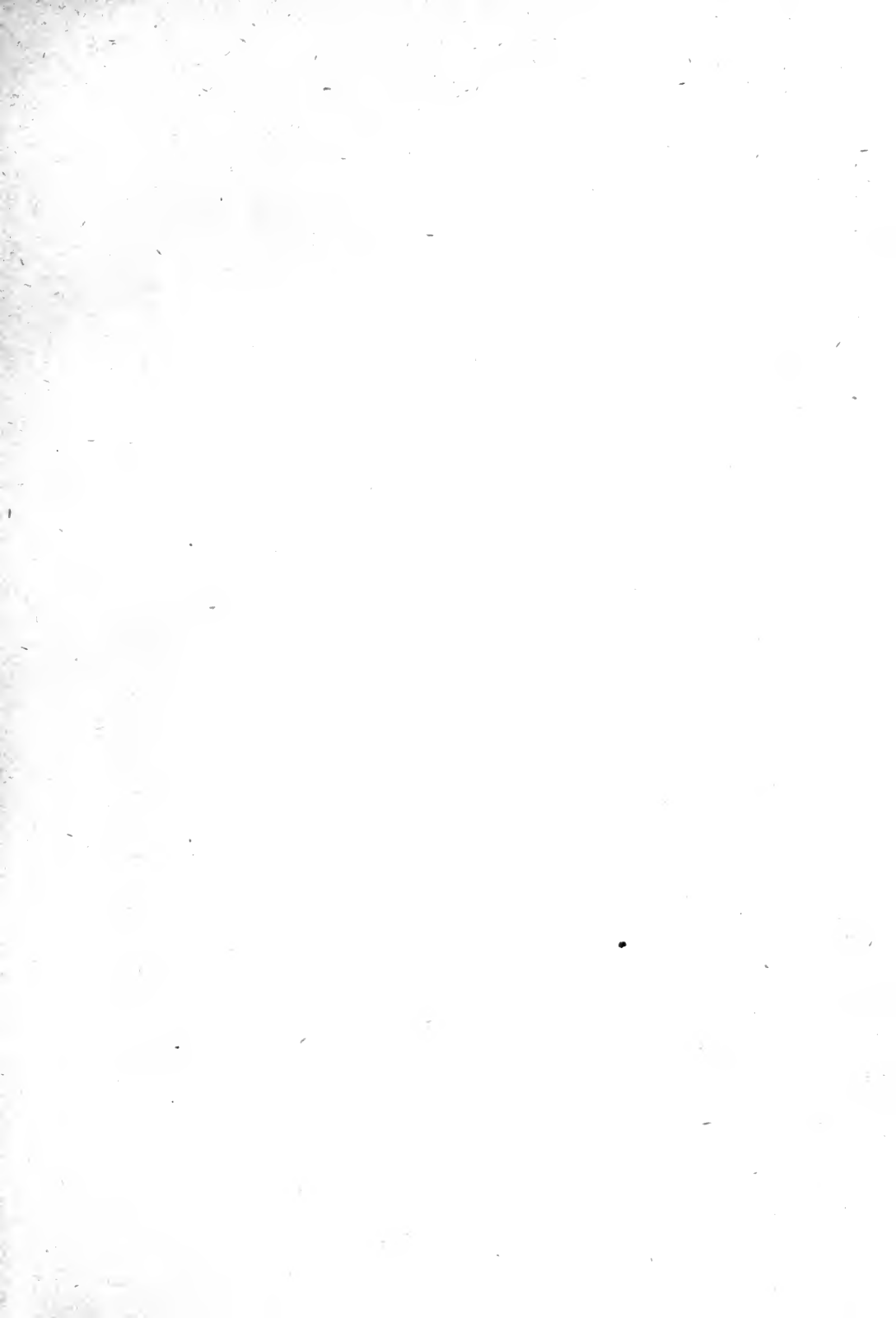
We append a passage translated from one of Pliny the Younger's epistles (*Ep.* ix. 7), and written to his friend Romanus :—

On the shores of the Larian Lake I have several villas, but two occupy me most, because I like them the best. One placed on rocks, after the fashion of Baiae, overlooks the lake ; the other, no less after the fashion of Baiae, touches it. So I am wont to call the former "Tragedy," and the latter "Comedy"—the one because it is lifted, as it were, on the tragic shoe, the other rests nicely upon the comic slipper. Each has its own charm. One enjoys a nearer, and the other a further prospect. This overlooks one bay of a gentle curve, the other dominates two from its lofty site. There a straight walk stretches above the coast in a long vista—here a broad terrace slopes gently to the shore. That one feels no waves ; this one touches the waves. From that you may look down on fishermen below ; from this you yourself may fish, throwing the hook from your bedroom, and even from your very bed, just as from a little boat.

How delightful an experience to an angler would be that of hooking one of Paolo Giovio's hundred-pound trout on a fly dexterously cast from his bedroom window !

We have mainly followed, in the above translation from Pliny's letter, the translation which appears of the same passage in Mr. Lund's *Como and Italian Lake-land*.

Above Lenno, at the entrance to the Val San



IN THE GARDEN OF THE VILLA ARCONATI,
LAGO DI COMO



to mail
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Bellagio, Cadenabbia, and the Tremezzina

Benedetto, so called because of an ancient Benedictine monastery which stands at the head of the valley, is the pilgrimage church of the Madonna del Soccorso—our Lady of Help. This shrine is an object of great devotion among the women of the Larian district, and the pilgrimages and *feste* in connexion with it are the cause of a great deal of drunkenness among the men. The ascent to the church is by a steep winding lane, at the sides of which are little shrines containing terra-cotta groups representing scenes from the New Testament. The church contains some good marbles, and many votive offerings. The legend to which the sanctuary owes its foundation is much the same as a thousand others of the sort. A dumb girl tending goats found in a cave an image of the Madonna and Child, and, the power of speech miraculously returning to her, was able to tell of her discovery. The image was placed in a small chapel built for its reception on the site of the cave on which it was found. Afterwards, however, it was taken to the neighbouring church of the Isola Comacina. As a sign, however, of her discontent with her new surroundings, the Madonna removed herself not once, but several times, to her original shrine, and so the present stately sanctuary was built for her permanent residence. On the 8th of September her *festa* is kept by the peasants, who flock from all parts of the country, bringing their gifts in kind and in money.

Needless to say, if we turn to our boatman, or to any of the younger generation whose powers of reasoning have become enlarged by education and military

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service, we are met by a humorous smile when we ask their opinion concerning the cult of the Madonna del Soccorso. Whether it be wise, however, to attempt to banish these comparatively harmless superstitions at the risk of replacing them by a dull materialism, is a question that, we think, all should ask themselves, before saying a word to shake the faith of those whose lack of education deprives them of the power to reason. The walk up the Val Benedetto is very beautiful. A little way up the hill to the right of Lenno stands the large Cistercian monastery of Acqua Fredda. The cypresses in front of this building are said to be the largest in Lombardy, and to have been planted in the twelfth century. After having been abandoned for many years, some of the expelled French Cistercians have lately taken up their abode at Acqua Fredda. The monks of Acqua Fredda migrated to the Certosa of Pavia, and for nearly two hundred years the vast building was used for secular purposes. Now, however, it seems destined to return to its original use.

The tongue of land stretching out into the lake, now commonly known to English visitors as the Balbianello point, was originally called the Dosso di Lavedo, and also Dosso d'Abido. It has its name of Balbianello from a former owner of the property, Cardinal Darini. This Prince of the Church built the villa with its graceful loggia and picturesque landing-place, and called it Balbianello after another of his possessions named Balbiano. The Cardinal, who was a man of learning and a great patron of art and artists, died in 1797, and

VILLA ARCONATI, LAGO DI COMO



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is buried in the old Abbey Church of Sant' Abbondio in Como. The villa was bought by the Marchese Arconati, and it now belongs to the widow of the late Marchese, a French lady who, however, rarely comes to it. The Villa Arconati owes everything to its loggia and its *porto* built by Cardinal Darini, and most of all to its beautiful and romantic position embracing a double view of the lake. The house is inconvenient and devoid of any good rooms. It contains a library in which there are, or were a few years ago, some curious and rare volumes. In the hands of an owner who cared about the place, the gardens might be made almost unique for characteristic beauty ; but unfortunately the villa is practically deserted, being left in the charge of a gardener who can have little encouragement to work for an employer so rarely seen.

A short row from the Villa Arconati brings us to the one island on the Lake of Como, the Isola Comacina, and at the same time to one of the most interesting and historic spots on the Lario.

CHAPTER VIII

THE COMACINA

The Isola Comacina—Pliny's descriptions of the Isola—Its history—The Magistri Comacini—The *festa* of San Giovanni all' Isola—St. John's watchfires—The "Pietra della Luna"—Ospedaletto—The "Valley of Intellect."

THE Isola Comacina, a small island of under half a mile in length and perhaps four hundred yards or so in breadth, is separated from the mainland by a narrow strait. This channel used to be called the Zocca dell' Olio, probably on account of the richness of the olive gardens on its shores, and the quantity of oil produced by them.

Pliny, it is supposed, alludes to this spot in a letter (*Ep.* i. 8) to Rufus, in a passage of which the following translation occurs in Mr. Lund's volume before mentioned :—

How fares Como, our common joy? How is the charming villa, the vernal portico, the shady avenue of planes; the strait, green and jewelled; the lake stretching below, awaiting your orders; the promenade so soft and firm; the sunny bath; the rooms for the many and for the few [we feel that we should have preferred those for the few]; the chambers for midday siesta and midnight sleep?

A GREY MORNING, LAGO MAGGIORE



The Comacina

The records of this little island take us back to the middle of the sixth century, and for six hundred years the Isola Comacina played an important part in Lombard history, until the dismantling of its fortifications in the year 1169. Those earlier centuries present so chaotic a tale of invasions and counter-invasions, struggles between barbarian tribes from the north, and internecine wars between various Lombard factions, that we do not propose to weary our readers by any attempt circumstantially to describe or disentangle it. We must refer those who are desirous to follow the early history of Lombardy at this period to the fifth volume of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Perhaps the chief claim of the Isola Comacina on our attention in connection with those times is the fact that it was the last place in Northern Italy, with the exception of Ravenna, which remained loyal to the Roman Empire, and for years resisted the attacks of the invaders, and afterwards of the Lombard King Autaris (Flavius), the husband of Queen Theodolinda, when this warrior had subdued all Italy as far as distant Calabria.

During these years the Isola Comacina served as a fortified retreat for refugees from the barbarians, and under the Italian general Francioni withstood the power of the northern invaders in the name of the imperial government at Constantinople.

Eventually, after a six months' siege, the island capitulated to the army and fleets of Autaris.

We find, in connection with this honourable capitulation, another example of the enlightened and civilising

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influence of that remarkable woman, Queen Theodolinda, who governed the Lombard kingdom after the death of her first husband Autaris. During the independence of the island of the Comacina, the artisans of Como, a body which, under the name of *Magistri Comacini*, was famous throughout Italy for its skill in architecture, building, and all branches of art, found refuge on the Isola. Theodolinda, and her daughter who married Rotharis, King of the Lombards, protected this body, and employed members of it to build her cathedral at Monza. There can be little doubt that it is to this enlightened queen that the preservation and subsequent development of much of the early Italian art is due.

The Isola Comacina, however, appears to have soon emancipated itself from the power of the Lombard kings ; for we find the Duke Gandolfo of Bergamo taking refuge here, when fighting against Theodolinda's second husband, the Duke of Turin. In 1169 the people of Como, aided by the Republic of the Tre Pievi, succeeded in taking the island after a desperate siege by land and water, and devastated it completely. In vain the Isolani implored help from Milan. The Milanese, exhausted by their struggle with Frederick Barbarossa, were powerless to send troops to the assistance of the island. The inhabitants, such of them as were left alive, fled to the mainland, where they founded a village called Nuova Isola, and some are said to have settled in Varenna.

The Isola Comacina remained deserted and abandoned from that day until the year 1848, when it again heard the sighs of prisoners and the clash of arms. Fifteen

The Comacina

hundred Croatian rebels against the Austrian dominion were sent to this island in that year, and encamped upon it until they were allowed by the Austrian Government to return to their homes. At the present time the Isola Comacina is peaceful enough. A few peasants cut its hay crops or gather its olives, returning after their day's work across the "green and jewelled" strait to the mainland. A solitary little church stands upon it, dedicated to San Giovanni Battista, on the site of the sanctuary which in days long past must have witnessed strange and stirring scenes. Its most stirring scene in these days takes place on the feast of St. John, every 24th of June. On that day the waters round the island are alive with gaily dressed boats, which, headed by a barge containing gorgeously vested priests, glide in procession round its shores. Afterwards mass is celebrated in the little church, and the sound of chants and hymns float over the lake. Then a fair is held—the Fiera di San Giovanni—under the olives and plane-trees, and other chants, of a very different nature, float across the lake, so soon as a certain quantity of the strong red wine of the district has been consumed.

Up to almost the middle of the nineteenth century a kind of mystery-play was yearly enacted on the Isola Comacina during this *festa*, representing the life and beheading of the Baptist. This custom gradually fell into disuse, and has been replaced by the present procession of boats and the fair. On St. John's Eve watchfires may still be seen blazing on some of the mountains above the lake. Readers of Professor Frazer's

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learned and fascinating work—*The Golden Bough*—will find this old custom of lighting watchfires on St. John's Eve traced to its earliest sources. It may well be that the survival in the Comasco district of these fires owes its origin to those unknown worshippers, under various emblems, of a Supreme Being, who raised the huge monoliths to be found in this country, such as the so-called "Pietra della Luna" above Civenna, and the Pendola, or rocking-stone, of Mompiatto, above Torno. Geologists and archæologists differ, we believe, as to whether these great blocks of granite, of which there are several in the Brianza district, were placed in their positions by the gradual action of glaciers, or by the hand of man. Probably glaciers were the primary cause of the transport of these stones to their isolated position. But that they were in some way connected with the religion and the sacred rites of an ancient people is fairly proved by the crescent moon cut in the Pietra della Luna monolith—an emblem of the moon-worship of the primitive Gauls, who descended into Lombardy centuries before the Christian era.

The original church on the Isola Comacina was not dedicated to St. John the Baptist, but to Santa Eufemia. This edifice, of which only traces remain, was built by Agrippinus, Bishop of Como, who was afterwards canonised early in the seventh century.

From the Isola Comacina a particularly beautiful old campanile on the mainland near by strikes the eye, and has been painted by innumerable artists. This old

IN THE SHADOW OF THE TERRACE



The Comacina

belfry is supposed to be the last remnant of a hospice for pilgrims on their way to the Holy Land, whence its present name of Ospedaletto. This place was also the original home of the Giovio family, the ancestors of the two historians of the Lario, Paolo and his descendant Count G Giovio, to whose writings we have so frequently referred in these pages.

After leaving the Isola Comacina, the next place of interest we reach is the town of Argegno, situated in the corner of the second large basin of the lake, at the entrance to the Val d' Intelvi. The town itself presents no attractions to delay us, but from it the beautiful "Valley of Intellect"—as the name, Val d' Intelvi is supposed to signify, so-called on account of the celebrated men who have been associated with it—may be visited. This pass connects the Lake of Como with the Lake of Lugano, and by it we may arrive at the famous Monte Generoso, from the top of which is, at least to our mind, the most beautiful of all the celebrated views in Central Europe, and which is described in the opening chapter of this volume. A carriage road from Argegno goes up the Val d' Intelvi to Lanzo d' Intelvi, whence, from the midst of attractive woods, there is a fine view of the Lake of Lugano.

From Argegno we must now cross the lake, which at this portion attains its greatest depth. The mountains seem at this point entirely to close the lower end of this basin of the lake ; but as we row inwards they gradually recede, and disclose its last and most southerly part, at

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the extremity of which lies the city of Como, approached by smiling shores thickly covered with villas, and gardens gay with roses and oleanders. Close down on the edge of the lake, with no other habitation near it, and backed by dark woods which cast a mysterious shadow over the great block of building, stands the Villa Pliniana, to which, and to its indirect associations with the country life led by a great Roman gentleman of the empire, we propose to devote the following chapter.



VILLA PLINIANA, LAGO DI COMO



CHAPTER IX

PLINY AND THE VILLA PLINIANA

Villa Pliniana—Count Anguisola—Princess Cristina Belgiojoso—
The mysterious fountain—Pliny's description and suppositions
concerning it—The two Plinies—Conditions of Roman
society in Pliny's day—Characteristics of the younger Pliny—
Torno—The Santo Chiodo—Villa Taverna—Villa d' Este.

THE Villa Pliniana is, beyond any doubt, the most interesting, as it is the most picturesque and uncommon, of all the Larian villas. With the single exception of the Palazzo Gallio at Gravedona, it is unequalled for the solitary grandeur of its situation, nor is there any villa or palace on the other Lombard lakes which can at all compare with it in point of natural and historical interest. Overshadowed by the mountains and crags rising abruptly behind it, this great building has a mystic, almost a tragic air about it that is all its own.

Even in the height of summer, the sun only shines on its façade for a few hours during the day. An intense stillness, broken only by the song of birds, the splashing of its unaccountable stream, or the lapping of the lake on the time-worn steps at its entrance-gate, broods over the place. Giant cypresses stand like

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sentinels on a rocky plateau above the house, as though keeping guard over the secret of the mysterious spring which baffled Pliny's understanding, and caused the villa to be for so many long centuries associated with his name.

The present edifice is connected, although indirectly, with a grim tragedy in its very origin. It was built in 1570 by Count Giovanni Anguisola, one of the four nobles of Piacenza who killed Pier Luigi Farnese of evil memory, Duke of Parma and Piacenza, and son of the Farnese Pope Paul III., and threw his mutilated corpse out of a window.

This Count Anguisola was afterwards Governor of Como, and a great supporter of the Guelf cause against the Papacy. He is said to have built the Villa Pliniana not only as a retreat in which he might be secure from assassination at the hands of the emissaries of the Papal Court, but also as a retreat from the world, remorse for the murder of the Farnese having in later life preyed upon his mind.

In the eighteenth century the Villa Pliniana belonged to the Visconti family, and the Visconti arms at its entrance record the fact that it was at one time among their innumerable properties. Within the house there is little to be seen of interest. The present owners, fond and proud as they are of their unique possession, were wont in past years to pass a few weeks in it during the great heat of summer; but of late years they have not unnaturally preferred their other residences; the Villa Pliniana being only suitable to live

THE LOGGIA, VILLA PLINIANA,
LAGO DI COMO



TO THE
ARMY

Pliny and the Villa Pliniana

in for so limited a period. The rooms are of stately proportions, and contain some good pieces of old furniture and family portraits.

Among the many remarkable men and women of later times who have occupied the Villa Pliniana, the Princess Cristina Belgiojoso must not be forgotten. In the middle of the nineteenth century she was the heroine of Italy, and the fearless enemy of the Austrian interlopers in her country's government. Born a Princess Belgiojoso, of the great Lombard house of the name, she married Prince Trivulzio of Milan. The marriage, however, was not a very happy one, and the Princess threw herself heart and soul into the stormy politics of her day, espousing with enthusiasm the Italian national cause against the Austrians. She was obliged to escape to Paris, where she passed several years in supporting with a brilliant pen the cause of Italy against its foreign parasites. In 1848 she joined the Piedmontese army, under Carlo Alberto di Savoia, having herself raised and equipped a body of Lombard volunteers which she commanded. After the reverses suffered by Carlo Alberto's troops, she was formally banished from Italy by the Austrian Government. Later on she took part with Garibaldi's troops against the French attack on Rome.

An ardent admirer of Cavour, she used her great personal influence, and the prestige gained by her brave devotion to her country, to further the glorious cause of Italian unity as conceived by that great statesman. Her large estates—and among them the Villa

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Pliniana—which had been confiscated by the Austrians, had previously been restored to her by the general amnesty proclaimed in favour of the Italian revolutionists in the year 1856. Princess Cristina Belgiojoso was as famous for her great beauty, her charm of manner and disposition, as for her intellectual powers and her personal courage. Her death, in 1871, was regarded by patriotic Italians of all classes as a national bereavement. From this distinguished lady the Villa Pliniana passed to her daughter, its present intellectual and charming owner, the Marchesa Trotti-Bentivoglio.

The great attraction of the Villa Pliniana, apart from its striking position and natural surroundings, is of course the wonderful intermittent spring which so greatly exercised the mind of the younger Pliny nearly twenty centuries ago, and which still ebbs and flows at repeated intervals in the course of the twenty-four hours, as it did when Pliny observed it.

We will quote Pliny's description of it in the passage occurring in a letter to Licinius Sura (*Epist.* v. 7), which description might equally be written to-day. This extract from Pliny's letter to his friend is preserved in fresco on the wall of the beautiful loggia in the centre of the villa, under which the spring empties its waters into the lake.

I have brought you (writes the Roman philosopher and naturalist) a little gift from my native place in the shape of a problem quite worthy of your profound knowledge. A spring rises in the mountain, runs down among the rocks, and is received in an artificial chamber where one can take one's

ISOLA BELLA, LAGO MAGGIORE



TO THE
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midday meal. After a short halt there, it falls into the Lake of Como. Its nature is extraordinary. Three times in the day it increases and decreases with regular rise and fall. This is plainly visible, and most interesting to watch. You lie beside it and eat your food, while you drink of the spring itself, which is intensely cold. Meantime it either rises or falls with sure and measured movements. Place a ring, or any other article you please upon a dry spot. The water reaches and at length covers it ; again it slowly retires and leaves the object dry. If you watch long enough, you may see this process repeated a second and a third time.

Can it be that some hidden current of air alternately opens and closes the mouth and jaws of the spring as it rushes in or as it is driven out again ? For this is a phenomenon which we see occurring to bottles and similar objects, in which the recipient is neither wide nor able to be at once emptied. Objects of this kind, even when turned upside down, discharge their contents with what may be described as a series of gulps, owing to some resistance of air.

Or, is the nature of the Ocean the nature also of this spring ? On the same principle that the former ebbs and flows, does this humble stream also experience its tidal action ?

Or, as rivers falling into the sea are forced back by adverse winds and rising tides, so is there a force interrupting the flow of this spring ? Or, in subterranean channels is there some reservoir the periods of whose emptying and filling affect the action and volume of this stream ?

Or, is there some mysterious law of compensation which gives an impetus to the spring when low, and restrains it when high ?

Investigate, for you are capable of doing so, the causes of so wonderful a phenomenon. For me it is sufficient to have given you a proper account of it.

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As in the case of the Fiume di Latte, described in a previous chapter, no entirely satisfactory explanation has been found to account for the phenomenon so accurately observed by Pliny. The fountain of the Pliniana, indeed, is more mysterious and inexplicable in its action than the Fiume di Latte, as it ebbs and flows not once in the course of a few days or weeks as in the case of the last-named torrent, but, as we have seen, several times in the course of a few hours.

The double loggia, with its graceful arches and their supporting columns, which now forms as it were the receptacle under which the mysterious spring passes before taking its final leap into the lake, is an idyllic spot in which to pass a hot summer afternoon, or to follow Pliny's example and breakfast at the edge of the stream. In its centre stands a *vasca* of limpid water, surmounted by the figure of a nymph, trident in hand, gazing over the lake; while huge terra-cotta jars, containing aloe and flowering plants, flank the walls and balustrade, over which we can lean and watch the waters of the spring mingling with those of Lario. Terraced gardens, steep rock-cut steps, and paths lead through the silent woods and up towards the great crags which tower behind the villa. It would scarcely be surprising, in the summer stillness, to light upon some sleeping sylvan deity, some faun or dryad, oblivious that the centuries have passed, and that another God than Pan rules. Even the nightingales are silent here. Only, every now and again, the mocking laugh of the green woodpecker resounds through

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the woods ; and sometimes the hissing and snoring of an owl in her nest far up in the decayed hollows of a Spanish chestnut-tree causes us, as we pass underneath the sweeping branches, to glance round with an uneasy start at the sudden breaking of the solemn stillness around.

Before turning our back upon this "haunt of ancient peace," with which Pliny and his circle of intimates have for so long been associated, we shall not, we trust, weary our readers if we ask them to pause awhile, and attempt to enter a little into the life and spirit of the age and social conditions in which Pliny lived and recorded his thoughts and feelings. The majority of people, we suspect, who visit the Lake of Como are rather bored than otherwise by having Pliny and his sayings constantly turning up when they are out for a day's excursion. Beyond the fact that Pliny was an ancient Roman writer of a philosophical bent of mind, who possessed a confusing number of villas on the Larian Lake, the average visitor to his beloved haunts knows very little about either the man or the very interesting phase of Roman life that he so worthily represented—that phase which has almost escaped notice in the lurid glare cast by biassed historians such as Suetonius, or by professional satirists such as Martial and Juvenal, on the conditions of society during the rule of the Claudian Cæsars, and the existence of which proves how exaggerated and misleading is the generally adopted view of Roman society under the empire which unreasonably

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assumes the whole social system of those days to have been egoistic and corrupt.

The younger Pliny, whose proper name was Publius Cæcilius Secundus, was born in 61 or 62 A.D., the year in which Nero celebrated his marriage with Poppæa. He was in his eighteenth year when his uncle and adoptive father, the elder Pliny, was killed in the eruption of Vesuvius which entombed Herculaneum and Pompeii. His guardian, the great general Virginius Rufus, twice refused the imperial power at the hands of his victorious legions. The Plinies, belonging to the Cæcilian family, were already settled at Como, where they possessed large estates, in the year 59 B.C. Pliny the younger has recorded some of the incidents in the life of his uncle, who was born in 23 A.D., during the reign of Tiberius, who lived through the reigns of terror of Caligula and Nero, and held high office under the good Emperor Vespasian. According to his nephew's letters, the elder Pliny was wont to begin his literary work at midnight, and was frequently interrupted about the dawn by a visit from the Emperor Vespasian on official business. He spent his whole day, between the hours of his official work, in reading and writing, assisted by secretaries, and himself owns to having consulted more than two thousand volumes during the compilation of his *Natural History*, for which work he filled one hundred and fifty volumes with closely written notes in his own hand.

As Mr. Dill observes in his learned work, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*, to which we are

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largely indebted for the valuable information and side lights it affords any student of those times, a book like Suetonius' *Lives of the Cæsars*, by concentrating attention on the emperors and the immediate circle of courtiers and sycophants around them, is apt to suggest misleading conclusions as to the conditions of society at large. Many people read Suetonius, and are duly scandalised or amused, according to the spirit in which they read him. But comparatively few take the trouble to read the Plinies, who show to the world another side of the picture of Roman social life, certainly not, as we may suppose, less accurately described and probably much more widely representative than the descriptions of Suetonius, Martial, Juvenal, and others, of the wild follies, excesses, and extravagances of a vicious circle surrounding more than semi-insane tyrants.

Side by side with the cruelty, the corruption, and the intense selfishness of the Imperial Court and its circle, to which such great and popular prominence is given, and upon which Christian writers in the days immediately succeeding those of the Claudian and Flavian Cæsars have, for very obvious reasons, laid such special stress, there existed another life, the life of which Pliny and his friends were undoubtedly living examples in common with countless other citizens of the empire of all degrees and conditions.

A lady whose archæological and historical reputation stands among the highest in Europe, the Countess Cætani-Lovatelli, has lately published an account of the philanthropic institutions, both State-maintained and

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privately supported, during the days of the worst Roman emperors ; and both in this volume and in that of Mr. Dill, above alluded to, the reader will find ample food for reflection as to whether Roman society, even in the days of Nero and Caligula, was as black as the modern world has delighted to paint it.

We should be too obviously departing from the legitimate scope of this volume were we to attempt to enter upon any detailed description of the life led by the younger Pliny and the circle he gathered round him in his Larian villas. It must suffice to say that this life presents no little similarity to that of a great landowner and well-educated country gentleman of our own times in our own land. Care and solicitude for his slaves and his tenants, hospitality to his friends and neighbours, keen interest in the welfare of his estates, in the beauties of nature, in sport of all kinds, each of these pleasant and familiar attributes are to be traced in Pliny's letters which have survived him for so many centuries.

Notwithstanding his fame and popularity in Rome, and the numerous calls upon both his time and his purse, Como always held the first place in Pliny's heart (*Plin. Ep. i. 3 : Comum meae deliciae*). Among many other generous and philanthropic acts he gave a sum equal to about nine thousand pounds of our money to found a library in the town of Como itself, and endowed it with an annual income of eight hundred pounds. He gave between four and five thousand pounds to support and educate poor boys and girls of the working classes in Como Finding that clever

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boys of the better-off classes were obliged to go to Milan for their higher education, Pliny offered to contribute one-third of the sum necessary to found a college in Como if the parents would contribute the remainder (*Plin. Ep.* iv. 13). In his public acts of generosity and munificence Pliny was only one example among countless others that have been handed down to posterity that charity and thought for the wants of others were not, as is so often preached, prerogatives of Christian teaching. Moreover, if we are to believe the tale told by endless inscriptions existing in every part of the world where the Roman rule had penetrated, acts of charity and unselfishness were not confined to the highly educated and refined, such as Pliny, but were fairly common to all grades and classes, even to the lowest.

In his private benefactions the younger Pliny was not less generous and thoughtful than in his public munificence. A friend dies leaving an only daughter and a heavily mortgaged estate. Pliny takes over the debts and gives the girl a dowry. He gives to another friend a sum of money equal to £2500, sufficient to enable him to take up a position offered him. He buys and presents to his old nurse a little property which costs him £800.

The last picture left to us of Pliny is one of care and thoughtfulness for others. He is in Bithynia with his third wife Calpurnia, granddaughter of Calpurnius Fabatus, a landowner of Como. The grandfather falls ill and dies, and Calpurnia is anxious to return to Como to be with her family. Pliny, who is on an official

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mission, gives her an order to use the public post on her journey to Italy ; and not having time previously to ask the Emperor Trajan's permission for this act, writes to him a letter explaining the situation, to which letter the Emperor replies in another full of kindness and sympathy (*Plin. Ep. ad Traj.* 121).

Pliny left in his will about £4000 for public baths, a sum of £16,000 to his freedmen, and many other charitable bequests.

From the Villa Pliniana a short row, or a walk by a path above the lake, brings us to the little town of Torno, which early in the sixteenth century was in the hands of a French garrison, a part of the army sent by France to aid Lodovico Sforza to deal with his unruly subjects in Lombardy. His son, Francesco II. of Milan, soon found that his father's allies were gradually absorbing all the trade of the richest part of the Comasco district, and, being anxious to dislodge them, requested the aid of Spain. The Spanish troops eventually sacked Torno, committing appalling atrocities on the inhabitants.

The parish church of San Giovanni Battista at Torno boasts the possession of one of the nails of the Cross. It was brought by a German bishop returning from the Holy Land after the first Crusade. The bishop was detained by storms at Torno, and these storms became so severe that he was convinced that it was the Divine will that the sacred relics he carried with him should remain in the church of San Giovanni ; so here the nail, and a leg-bone of one of the Holy Innocents,

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which was also among the good bishop's luggage, remain to this day. At Torno is also the Villa Taverna, with spacious and shady gardens by the side of the lake. It belongs to Count and Countess Taverna, who spend much of their time here in summer. The Countess Taverna, well known in Rome for her energy and capability in organising good works, and also for her hospitality in the old palace of the Orsini on Monte Giordano, was by birth a Princess Boncompagni-Ludovisi, and is one of the *Dames du Palais* to the Queen.

The Lake of Como from this point onwards has more the appearance of a majestic river than a lake. Its shores are lined with villas, gardens, and silk manufactories, while above them vineyards and woods clothe the slopes of the green mountains. In the villas in this neighbourhood many celebrities in the world of art, literature, and politics, of all nationalities, have at divers times sought a retreat to rest, or to pursue their occupations undisturbed.

Across the lake, close to Cernobbio, stands the enormous Villa d' Este, originally built by Cardinal Gallio, now an hotel. It was for some time the residence of the unfortunate Queen Caroline, wife of King George IV. of England. The Villa d' Este is surrounded by extensive and picturesque grounds, the chief feature of which is the cypress avenue leading up to the higher ground behind the house, down the green slope of which a stream is made to descend by artificial channels. The interior of the villa is now remarkable

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only for its spacious apartments, and contains nothing of interest. Between Cernobbio and Como is the modern villa of the wealthy Duke Visconti Modrone, which is fitted with every "up-to-date" luxury. Like all the villas, however, in this part of the lake, it entirely lacks the old-world stateliness and natural beauty of surroundings which lend so great a charm to those situated in the more remote part of the Lario. The gardens of the Villa del Pizzo, near Torriggia, are remarkable for a *viale* of gigantic cypress-trees which borders the lake.

CYPRESS AVENUE, VILLA DEL PIZZO,
LAGO DI COMO



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CHAPTER X

THE CITY OF COMO

The city of Como—Etruscan civilisation and Celtic barbarism—Greek colonisation of Como—Julius Cæsar's government of the city—Decadence of senatorial families—The Byzantine period—Lombard rule—The Visconti and Sforza—The Rusca and Vitani feuds—Lodovico il Moro—The Spanish tyranny—The Austrian domination—Monte Baradello—Naval battles—The Carroccio—Napoleone della Torre—San Carpaforo—The Cathedral of Como—The Frog—The Broletto—Sant' Abbondio—Porta della Torre—Alessandro Volta—Silk and silkworms.

THE origin and foundation of the city of Como are lost in the mists of antiquity.

Cato supposes the city to have originated with the *Orobii*, a people existing for us only in name, since all traces of their history have long ago perished.

For probably six centuries, and possibly for more, the ancient Etruscan race ruled at Como—that mysterious and artistic nation whose language still baffles the philologist, and whose complete history has yet to be written. It is probable that the Etruscans, with their highly-advanced civilisation, their art and industries, absorbed into their system the savage *Orobii*, whose

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settlements were scattered over the northern portion of Italy. Twelve stately cities were built by the great Etruscan race north of the Apennines, and it can scarcely be imagined what level its civilisation would have reached, and what the effects of that civilisation would have been on western life generally, had the powers which control the fate of nations allowed it time fully to develop itself. Destiny, however, ordained that Etruscan civilisation north of the Apennines was to perish at the hands of Celtic barbarism.

The first traces of Celtic domination appear in the year 595 B.C., when a horde of Gallic Celts swept down from the Alps and invaded the northern colonies of Etruria, by degrees spreading southwards into the heart of the Etrurian kingdom. The rich Etruscan cities, with their massive walls and stately temples; the ancient Etruscan cult, with its faith in a future life and its reverent care for its dead; Etruscan art which, if we may judge from the exquisite pieces of statuary found from time to time in the tombs of this extraordinary race, must have reached a level that even the Greeks could not afford to despise—all these vanished before the inroads of the transalpine barbarians.

It was not till about the year 200 B.C. that Lombardy, devastated by the Celtic invasion, was recolonised by P. Strabo, the father of Pompey the Great. Julius Cæsar finally completed Strabo's work by giving municipal life to the province, and admitting it into the hegemony of Roman rule. On taking up the governorship of Cisalpine Gaul, Julius Cæsar brought to the

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Comasco district a colony of five thousand citizens of the empire. Among these was a band of five hundred Greeks of noble family, who, settling at Como, gave to their city the name of *Novocomo*. Under this Græco-Roman dominion the town rapidly rose to be a place of considerable importance, while fresh colonists from Greece settled on the shores of the Larian Lake, leaving, as we have already seen, records of their fatherland in such names as Corenno (Corinth), Dorio (Dorion), Delio (Delphi), Dosso d' Abido (Abydos), and others, and remains, too, of the beauty of form and feature of their race among the peasantry of these districts.

Under the governorship of Julius Cæsar, Como soon possessed its forum, its baths, its gymnasium, theatre, and municipal edifices, in common with other cities of the Roman Republic, and was a military station of primary rank.

Under the later empire, however, the prosperity of the city and province seems gradually to have declined. The ancient senatorial families, of whose beneficent and civilising rule we read with such admiration in descriptions left us by Pliny and others, became extinct or absorbed in the vortex of the capital.

We read of much during this period which brings home to us the truth of the old saying that history repeats itself. The rich were taxed until taxation gradually reduced them to poverty, and their poverty brought its natural consequences upon the lower classes, and especially upon the peasantry. Bureaucratic ad-

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venturers of all kinds sucked the life-blood out of the country, and batted upon the exploited landowners and upon the misery of the agricultural classes. To such a pitch had bureaucratic tyranny arrived in the province of Como at one period of its history, during the reign of the Emperor Caracalla, that every fruit-bearing tree and every row of vines in the vineyards was numbered and taxed. The small proprietors and the peasants, in order to avoid this burden, were wont to root up the fruit trees and vines, and whole districts thus became barren wildernesses. Rents were farmed out to middlemen for a fixed sum, and these "farmers" made what they could out of the land over and above the annual sum paid to the government or the absent proprietor. When the peasants, unable to pay the taxes, fled to the mountains, they were dragged back and made to work in chained gangs.

Under the rule of modern Italian bureaucracy the peasants fly to South America. They are not, it is true, dragged back in chains; but whole villages in Italy exist upon the money sent back to the inhabitants by emigrants, who are no longer able to earn a livelihood in their native country, owing to excessive taxation and prohibitive duties on the necessities of life. Vast tracts of country go out of cultivation, and Italy loses yearly the vigorous manhood of the best of her sons.

The Emperor Constantine issued an edict making it obligatory upon parents to bring up their sons in their own particular trade or occupation, nor was it allowed

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to any to choose for himself another trade than that practised by his father before him. The immediate results of this extraordinary policy were shown in the rapid decline of commerce and industry generally, while the arts and sciences soon threatened to come to a premature end in Lombardy, its professors seeking a refuge in the East. At Milan the lack of any instruction was so great, owing to the general exodus of men of education, that St. Augustine was specially sent from Rome to examine into the state of affairs in the Lombard capital.

The general decadence of the Roman administration was followed by the invasion of the Goths ; after them of the Huns under Attila ; the Vandals under Genseric ; and, lastly, the Ostrogoths. Each and all of these ravaged and devastated Lombardy at their pleasure, until finally the tottering Empire of the West fell under the sword of Odoacer. After this period the Byzantine epoch of Como may be said to have begun.

The Greek Emperor Justinian sent his general, Belisarius, to Como with instructions to reunite the province and its city to the imperial crown. The eunuch general Narsis was afterwards despatched by the Empress Sophia with the same object, and he it was who, calling to his assistance the Longobardian chief Albinus, paved the way for the long line of Lombard kings, twenty in all, who ruled over Lombardy from 569 to 759 A.D., and among whom Queen Theodolinda stands out supreme for the wisdom of her rule, her

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fervour in the cause of Latin Christianity, and her intimate association with the Larian Lake.

To follow the vicissitudes of Como and the Comasco during the succeeding centuries, in which wars with Milan and the contending influences of the Guelf and Ghibelline factions distracted the city and province would be an undertaking too lengthy for the space at our disposal, and too wearisome to the patience of our readers. For all practical purposes, the cession of Como to the Visconti rulers of Milan in 1335 marks the date at which the most interesting portion of its history may be said to commence. At the death, in 1402, of the great Visconti, Gian Galeazzo, who ruled over Milan and thirty-one other cities of Northern Italy, and whose ambition was to make himself King of Italy, the Lombard Duchy was divided among his three children, all under age. After a brief period of struggle between the two Comasco families of Rusca and Vitani, heads of the Guelf and Ghibelline parties in Como, the city was ceded by Franchino Rusca, who aided by the Milanese had vanquished the Vitani, to Filippo Maria Visconti. At his death, Milan became an independent Republic, under the title of Repubblica Ambrosiana, to which Como formally adhered, and swore fealty on the 25th September 1447.

In March 1450, however, Count Francesco Sforza, after besieging the city, gained possession of it, and eventually dominated Milan and the duchy of the fallen Visconti dynasty.

For two centuries, namely, from 1250 to 1433,

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Como had been distracted by the feuds and civil wars of Rusca and Vitani, representing the Ghibelline and Guelf parties respectively. On the 13th December 1439 the two contending factions for the rule of the city were finally reconciled in a solemn peace by Fra' Bernardino da Siena. Until the year 1796 this event was annually commemorated by a public holiday, and by a solemn procession of the clergy and faithful, as an act of thanksgiving for the reconciliation. This anniversary, we believe, is still celebrated by a procession confined to the interior of the Duomo on the feast of Santa Lucia.

The youthful Duke Gian Galeazzo Sforza, son of Francesco, was placed under the guardianship of his uncle, Lodovico Sforza, nicknamed Il Moro. The boy's sister, Bianca Sforza—that Bianca Sforza whose tempestuous journey on the Lake of Como to join her imperial consort at Innsbruck has already been described—was Empress of Germany, wife of the Emperor Maximilian I., to whom she brought a dowry of 400,000 ducats. Maximilian supported the aspirations of Il Moro to supplant his nephew and possess himself of the Lombard duchy. Gian Galeazzo died at Pavia, after which Lodovico immediately caused himself to be proclaimed duke.

The Venetian government, however, fearing that Il Moro might seek to encroach upon the Veneto, summoned Louis XII. of France to their aid, and Lodovico was obliged to escape from Como into Germany, by way of the lake, while the city fell into

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the hands of the French army, which was commanded by the famous Milanese general, Trivulzio. Como, together with the entire duchy, then became a French possession for twelve years.

There are probably few men who have been so maligned by history as Lodovico il Moro. He has been described as a tyrant, a murderer, and placed in the same category as the Borgias and other unscrupulous rulers during the Renaissance period in Italy. There can be no doubt that the general misconception of Lodovico Sforza's real character had its origin in the violent diatribes hurled against him by the Ghibelline party, and by the Venetian Signoria, who ever dreaded possible encroachments on the Venetian State by the Lombard sovereigns.

It is, indeed, only of recent years that the great and striking qualities of Il Moro as a ruler, his wise administration of Lombardy, and his enlightened encouragement of art and commerce in his duchy, have been recognised. Recent investigations among the archives of Milan, Mantua, Ferrara, and Venice have revealed the true character of this great Sforza; and the slanders that branded him as the murderer of his nephew, Gian Galeazzo Sforza, the reigning Duke of Milan, as well as the accusations brought against him of cruelty and tyranny as a ruler, have been amply disproved by contemporary documents and letters.

Among many other benefits which Lodovico il Moro conferred upon his country were the introduction in Lombardy of the mulberry-tree, on the leaves of which

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the silkworms are fed, and the cultivation of rice. Politically, Il Moro aspired to make Northern Italy a free and independent State, and when at length he was betrayed into the hands of Louis XII. of France by a cowardly Swiss mercenary, and perished in the grim dungeons of Loches, after a long captivity, Italy fell for centuries into the hands of one foreign tyranny after another—only to be finally delivered from foreign domination by the House of Savoy in our own times.

So universally was the French rule detested, however, that Pope Julius II. called in the aid of the Swiss to expel the French garrison from Como and other cities of the Lombard duchy, and in June 1512 the city again returned to its allegiance to the Sforza family in the person of the Duke Maximilian Sforza. This prince was succeeded by another, Francesco Sforza, the last of his family to rule over Lombardy. He died in 1535. The Duchy of Milan was united to the Spanish monarchy, and Como was placed by the Emperor Charles V. under the jurisdiction of a Spanish governor, when, as we have already seen, it soon became the headquarters of one of the general courts of the execrable "Holy" Office of the Inquisition.

The Spanish dominion over Como may be said to have lasted from 1555 to the year 1714—159 years of tyranny and spoliation, during which Lombardy was in a state of steady retrogression, both socially and commercially.

The city of Como itself presented a lamentable

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example of the consequences of priestly predominance. In 1598 the population of the town was over 16,000. It possessed a flourishing trade in silks, iron, agricultural produce, and other articles of commerce. In 1603 the population had dwindled to less than 6000; its warehouses and factories were closed, and the rich and fertile country around it was a barren and unproductive wilderness. Over forty religious houses in Como alone had taken the place of thriving industrial establishments. The citizens and agricultural labourers had abandoned their homes, unable any longer to find employment in the stagnating city.

Female children were from birth vowed to the cloister; boys were either forced into seminaries, afterwards to become monks and clerics, or compelled to enter the army in order to swell the legions of Spain. Brigandage and every form of crime were rampant; payments for masses or indulgences being quite sufficient to secure acquittal at the hands of judges who were but the creatures of the priests. At the same time, the slightest suspicion of "heresy," the slightest symptom on the part of any person not belonging to the Castilian noblesse of a desire to emancipate himself from the deadly yoke of superstition, was punished with barbarous severity, and executions under the shadow of the Cathedral were of such constant occurrence, that stake, gibbet, and implements of torture formed part of the furniture—so to speak—of the Piazza del Duomo.

In case we should be suspected of exaggeration in

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our description of the spectacle given to the world by the Christian Church in the Comasco during the Cinquecento, we refer our readers to the well-known historical works of Cesare Cantù, and to the archives of Como and Milan.

In the year 1714 Prince Eugene of Savoy finally liberated Como and the Lombard duchy generally from the dominion of Spain and priestly tyranny. On the 6th March of that year Lombardy was placed under the Austrian rule, and, notwithstanding the peevish outbursts of "irredentism" in which the Italian press of these days is apt to indulge, it is to Austria and the Austrians that Northern Italy is in reality largely indebted for its superiority in prosperity and civilisation over the Italy which lies to the south of the Tuscan border.

Having thus briefly surveyed the various vicissitudes through which Como has passed in the course of its long history, we may proceed to consider some of the chief characteristics of the city itself, its monuments, and the eminent men it has given to the world of Science, Literature, and Art.

As the city of Como is approached by the waters of the lake, a conical hill, surmounted by a lofty tower, is conspicuous above the town. "Monte Baradello," as this hill is called, is supposed to owe its name to the ancient *barra*, or wall, which the Celtic invaders constructed much after the fashion of the Romans in Britain. It became under the Romans and the Lombards the strongly fortified citadel of Como. For ten long years,

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from 1118 to 1127 A.D., the Baradello withstood the frequent assaults of the Milanese armies during the struggle between Como and Milan, which was compared by historians and poets of the period with the siege of Troy. One Marcus Cumanus, possibly, and perhaps probably, a poet of the name of Marcus inhabiting Como, wrote an epic on this ten years' war. As usual, the contest originated in religious intrigue. The two rival claimants to the See of St. Peter had each nominated a bishop to the Comasco diocese: Landolfo Carcano, a Milanese priest, was the nominee of Pope Gregory VIII., but the Comasco preferred the nominee of the anti-Pope Urban II. They expelled Gregory's candidate from the diocese, and Milan declared war on the city of Como in order to avenge the indignity offered to a Milanese citizen.

Unluckily for Como, while Milan was supported by allies from Emilia and the Veneto, the other towns and villages on the Larian Lake seem to have been either openly hostile or secretly disaffected to her cause, and in sympathy with the Milanese. By land and by water the fierce struggle was carried on incessantly over a period of nearly ten years, first one side and then the other gaining temporary successes. In the meantime the Baradello served as the fortress and arsenal of Como, whence her troops made sorties when the city was closely besieged, or fell upon the unlucky villages and towns along the shores of the lake in revenge for assistance rendered by their inhabitants to the Milanese.

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A powerful fleet of armed galleys waged war on the waters of the lake, and a graphic account is left to us of a great naval battle which took place off the Punto di Bellagio, in the Lecco arm of the lake. The fleet from Lecco encountered the Comasco ships of war, and a fierce and terrible fight ensued, from which the Lecchesi were obliged to flee. Recovering themselves, however, they brought their ships out again from Lierna under cover of the darkness, and, creeping up to the Comasco fleet, dealt panic and destruction among it by frequent discharges of blazing missiles. At length, after a decade of almost ceaseless hostilities, Como was obliged to yield to the successive reinforcements which Milan, with the aid of her allies, was always enabled to despatch to the scenes of action.

But the triumph of Milan was not destined to be of very long duration. In 1159 the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa determined to crush the Guelfic faction, and consolidate his supreme dominion over Lombardy. He attacked Milan, which was the Guelfic stronghold against his authority, and practically destroyed the city, leaving little standing except its castle and its churches. In 1176 he again found it necessary to attempt the suppression of the League formed by the Lombard cities against him. On this occasion the Baradello at Como was his headquarters, and from here he led his troops to meet the Milanese army at Legnano, a few miles south of Como, leaving the Empress behind him in the fortress.

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In this battle, the car known as the *Carroccio*, to which allusion has already been made in a preceding chapter, played an important part. This car was escorted by a picked company of horsemen, nine hundred strong, and defended by three hundred young nobles, and this escort was named the Company of Death, its members being sworn to die rather than lose their precious charge. The car itself was drawn by four milk-white oxen in scarlet harness. In its centre a huge crucifix surmounted a globe, and above which, from a mast, floated the banner of the Milanese Republic. It contained an altar on which masses were said, and appliances for tending the wounded.

As the *Carroccio* moved forward towards the Imperial army, its escort kneeled down in prayer, and the Emperor believed that by this action the Milanese intended to convey to him their submission.

Nothing, however, was farther from their thoughts than submission to the Ghibellines. In the battle that ensued Frederick Barbarossa was utterly defeated. He fled from Legnano, and after wandering about for three days in various hiding-places, appeared unattended before the fortress of the Baradello, where the Empress was already mourning for him as dead on the field of battle.

In 1277 the Baradello became the prison-house of Napoleone della Torre, whom the Lombard people had elected as their chief magistrate and representative. He was captured by Ottone Visconti, Archbishop of Milan, whom he had expelled from the city, at the

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castle of Desio. From that place he was sent by the revengeful prelate to the Baradello. Here he and three of his sons, a brother, and a nephew, were imprisoned in three iron cages, in which they were kept till they had rather the resemblance of wild beasts than of human beings.

Napoleone della Torre at length became insane, and dashed his brains out against the iron bars of his cage. This ancient fortress was destroyed by order of the Emperor Charles V. during the Spanish occupation of the city and province of Como.

Baradello possesses, apart from its historical traditions, others of a more legendary character, being said to be the site of the execution of six martyrs, afterwards canonised, during the reign of the Emperor Diocletian. The ancient church of San Carpofo, dedicated to one of these saints, was originally the Cathedral church of Como. It contains the tomb of St. Felix, who is said to have been the first bishop of Como (391 A.D.), and who received his ordination at the hands of St. Ambrose himself, certain of whose letters to St. Felix are still existing at Milan.

In one of these letters the great Archbishop thanks St. Felix for a present of truffles of stupendous size (*vide* Mr. Lund's *Como and Italian Lake-Land*).

The bodies of the six sainted martyrs are, according to an ancient inscription, buried in this interesting church, while we find here another of the many proofs of the kindly thought of the much-abused Pagan Romans for their dependants. A Roman cenotaph

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records how one Lucius Sentius desires his posterity to remember not only himself and his family, but also the servant who had tended him in his old age.

The Cathedral of Como holds a high place among the Gothic edifices in Italy. Mr. J. A. Symonds, indeed, describes it as perhaps the most perfect building in Italy for illustrating the fusion of the Gothic and Renaissance styles—both of which, he adds, are of good type and exquisite in their sobriety.

The Piazza del Duomo, in which the Cathedral stands, was originally incorporated in the citadel constructed by Azzone Visconti. The walls of this citadel commenced at the shore of the lake, and included not only the site of the present Duomo, but also the municipal palace of the Broletto. The church of Santa Maria Maggiore, built in the year 1000, served as the Cathedral church of Como during the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, and this edifice was also isolated from the town by the walls of the Visconti citadel. Owing to this isolation, the small church of San Fedele was then used as the episcopal sanctuary. At the instance of the Bishop, however, the former Cathedral of Santa Maria Maggiore was restored to the people, and the Comaschi determined to convert it into a Duomo worthy to rank with the finest in Italy. The design of the present edifice was entrusted to Lorenzo degli Spazi, who was at that time engaged on the Duomo of Milan, and the black marble quarries of Olcio and white marble quarries of Musso were worked at the expense of the citizens of Como to

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provide the building materials. The Duke Gian Galeazzo of Milan contributed largely to the undertaking, and provided that all material used in the construction of the new Cathedral should be exempt from import duties. The work was begun in or about the year 1396 ; but it was not till 1485 that the façade was completed, and not till 1730 that the cupola was added and the building finished in all the details which it now presents.

Four centuries thus elapsed during the construction of this beautiful church in which various architectural authorities have observed the Gothic, Lombard, and Renaissance styles are so happily blended as to form a pleasing and harmonious whole—a result scarcely to be met with in any other edifice on which so many different architects, influenced by such varying traditions in their art, have worked.

The form of the church, which, like its predecessor, bears the title of Santo Maria Maggiore, is that of a Latin cross, the main body of the cross being of the black marbles of Olcio, and the arms of the white marble brought from the quarries of Musso.

Among the figures on the Lombardesque façade of the Cathedral is a statue of Cecco Simonetti, the faithful minister of Gian Galeazzo, who was put to death by Lodovico il Moro at the instance of the Ghibelline party, and much against Lodovico's will, Il Moro having done all in his power to save him from the scaffold. Flanking the central door of the façade are statues of the elder and younger Pliny ; though it may be

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doubted if the elder Pliny would have troubled himself to speak a favourable word for the new religious sect that was gaining ground in the world of his day.

The younger Pliny, as Governor of Bithynia, writes to the Emperor Trajan, asking for instructions as to how he should deal with the Christians in his province, and proceeds to bear tribute to their good works and general harmlessness as a body, adding that similar innocuous superstitions, if left alone, would doubtless die out of their own accord.

What would have been the humane and generous Roman's verdict on the professing followers of Christ's teaching, could he have witnessed the doings in Como of the Christian Church during the sixteenth century?

Above the great western entrance to the Duomo is a singularly beautiful rose window, and the doors of the church, especially those on the northern and southern sides, are surrounded by very elaborate and graceful sculpture. The northern doorway, indeed, is remarkable for a sculptured frog of hideous appearance, around which various tales have been woven. Perhaps the most curious of these stories is one which is no legend, but a fact of comparatively recent occurrence.

In the year 1850 a certain priest at Introigna, a village not far from Locarno, on the Lake Maggiore, declared that he was possessed of an ancient document indicating a spot in the Duomo of Como where a buried treasure might be found, and that this spot was precisely beneath the famous frog. The priest prevailed upon a master-builder at Como to search for the

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treasure, and this individual consented to do so on the condition that the priest would show him the document, and that the necessary permission to excavate were conceded by the authorities.

The priest at once produced the document in question. It was evidently genuine, and bore the date of 1470, or thereabouts. The contents were as follows :—

A treasure is to be found in the city of Como. Whoever shall find a carved frog, and shall dig beside it to a depth of eight *braccia*, will find an iron chest full of silver; digging farther he shall find another chest containing a corpse, and digging farther still, he shall come upon yet another chest containing gold.

On the strength of this mysterious document permission was given by the authorities to excavate at the spot named, on the condition that half the treasure, were it found, should be consigned to the municipality. The work was begun early in May 1852, and was carried on for a whole week, amid the intense excitement and curiosity of the Comaschi of all classes. Unluckily, however, absolutely nothing was discovered, except a spring of excellent water, and amidst jeers and hisses from the disappointed crowd the search was abandoned.

The document, however, discovered by the priest, seems to have been genuine so far as its age was concerned, and must be regarded as presumably a practical joke of the fifteenth century, which only reached its maturity four hundred years after conception.

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The principal architect employed on the interior of the Duomo was Tomaso Rodario, of Maroggia, on the Lake of Lugano. This artist had already gained fame and notoriety by his work in the Duomo of Milan and the Certosa near Pavia. His services at Como are commemorated on a tablet on the Cathedral walls.

The interior of the Duomo contains several fine paintings by Luini and Gaudenzio Ferrari. Of these a "Nativity" by Luini is full of that great artist's graceful and poetic imagination; and a "Flight into Egypt," by Ferrari, is considered to be one of this daring painter's masterpieces.

The only really fine statue in the Cathedral is Tomaso Rodario's St. Sebastian. This work bears favourable comparison with one of the very few statues by Bernini which can be dignified by the name of sculpture—his representation of the Christianised Apollo, which exists in the church of San Sebastiano fuori le Mura, at Rome. The rich piece of gilded wood-carving forming the tabernacle over the altar in the chapel of Sant' Abbondio is a very rare and perfect specimen of fourteenth century work.

The Duomo of Como contains some interesting tombs and busts of remarkable Comaschi. There is a fine bust of Benedetto Odescalchi, who was born at Como, and was elected Pope on the 21st September 1676, under the name of Innocent XI., and who enjoys an evil reputation for the intolerance he displayed against the Quietest, or Molinist "heretics," and his encouragement of the Inquisition.

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The great organ in the Cathedral possesses particularly rich, sweet tones ; that is to say, when the organist gives the instrument a chance of emitting them,—a thing to which an Italian organist rarely condescends, preferring, as he usually does, to rattle along his manuals and pedals *a tutta pressione* !

Immediately next to the Duomo is the ancient *Broletto*, the original town-hall of Como. This picturesque edifice dates from about the year 1215 A.D. Mr. Street, in his *Brick and Marble Architecture in North Italy*, declares it to be scarcely inferior in real beauty to any one building he had seen in Italy. The layers of black, white, and red marbles used in the construction of the palace give it a quaint and at the same time admirably rich effect, enhanced by the graceful pointed arches and octagonal pillars by which the whole block is supported. Under these arcades is held a fruit and vegetable market, which in summer and autumn lends a blaze of colour to the scene.

Not far from the Broletto and the Duomo is the church of San Fedele, which, as we have already observed, for many years served as the Cathedral of Como. The building dates from the sixth century, but it has been much modernised. In the interior, however, remain many of its ancient characteristics.

Of all the churches of Como, the Basilica of Sant' Abbondio is perhaps the most interesting, both architecturally and on account of its antiquity. It was at first dedicated to SS. Peter and Paul, but afterwards to

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Sant' Abbondio, Bishop of Como, who was originally buried here.

S. Abbondio, who gives his name to so many churches in the Comasco district, was a native of Thessalonica. Distinguished alike for his learning, piety, and diplomacy, he was sent by the Pope, S. Leo the Great, to Constantinople, where he gained great credit for his success in conducting the theological and political negotiations at the Byzantine Court entrusted to him by the Roman Pontiff. He appears also to have been regarded as an authority on the vexed questions of the Incarnation of Christ, and on other theological theories over which the Churches have argued and fought, such as the dual nature of Christ, and the definition of the Trinity.

He was appointed Bishop of Como, in succession to his friend and instructor Amanzius, and returned to his diocese after his diplomatic and theological triumphs won in the East for the Holy See.

On Easter Sunday, in the year 489, according to some accounts, Abbondio celebrated mass in his Cathedral at Como, in the presence of a vast congregation, to which, at the conclusion of the office, he announced that this day was his last on earth. After a discourse, in which he recommended his flock to remain firm in the profession of the Catholic faith, and to live virtuous lives, he became unconscious and died in a few hours.

The Comaschi buried their distinguished bishop with great pomp in the Basilica of SS. Peter and Paul,

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at Como. He was chosen as patron saint of the city, and for centuries his death was annually commemorated by solemn functions lasting fifteen days at Easter. On Easter day itself the three suburban parishes of the city were wont to march in procession to the monastery attached to the Basilica, and there to receive what was termed the *Pampara*. This *Pampara* consisted of a number of light cakes called *Nebbia*, tied together on a species of wand.

The abuses to which these fifteen days of holiday, during which all public offices were closed and business suspended, led, caused the custom to be abolished in the year 1621, when the monastery of Sant' Abbondio was formally ceded by Marco Gallio, the nephew of that Cardinal Gallio who built the palace at Gravedona, already described, to a religious sisterhood.

In the sixteenth century, during the demolition of an ancient altar in the Basilica, the tomb of Sant' Abbondio was discovered. The sarcophagus was of white marble, and under the episcopal cross surmounting it was an inscription of which the words—

Hic requiescit Abbundius episcopus
Qui vixit annos plus . . .
Decessit . . .

alone remained.

This sarcophagus was opened in the presence of Cardinal Gallio and the civic authorities.

An old chronicler of the period relates that the body of the saint was found entire, vested in a rich

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mitre and cope studded with gems, and with the episcopal ring on his finger. As, however, the clergy had not yet learned, in the days of Sant' Abbondio, to deck themselves in gold, rich silks, and precious stones, this is probably a pious imagination on the part of the chronicler, though there can be no doubt that the tomb discovered was that of the popular bishop.

The remains of Sant' Abbondio were eventually removed from the Basilica which now bears his name to the Duoma, and there reinterred under the altar dedicated to him.

The church of Sant' Abbondio is of considerable size. It has five aisles and a richly decorated apse, and the whole edifice is in the Lombard style of architecture.

During its restorations and additions in the year 1600 an ancient subterranean chapel was discovered, over the entrance to which was the inscription *Mercurio sacrum*—the site, no doubt, of a temple sacred to Mercury. Many of the bases and capitals of the columns in the interior of the Basilica are in all probability relics of this præ-Christian sanctuary.

Not far from this church is the imposing gateway formerly known as the Porta della Torre, but renamed Porta Vittoria in commemoration of a defeat inflicted by Garibaldi and his volunteer troops on the Austrian garrison of Como, under Marshal Urbain, in 1859, which resulted in the Austrians leaving the city by this ancient gateway fortified by the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa.

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The church of the Crocifisso near by takes its name from a miracle-working crucifix, brought hither in the fourteenth century by a body of monks. This crucifix is still held in high veneration by the more credulous members of the community, and on Holy Thursday is exposed to the adoration of the faithful, who bring money offerings to a considerable amount with them from the villages in the neighbourhood of Como, and from the poorer quarters of the city itself.

Considerations of space have forbidden us to do more than touch upon the more salient points in the history of the city of Como, and upon the chief characteristics of its principal monuments. Those of our readers who require more detailed information concerning Como, and the important part played by the Comaschi in the annals of Northern Italy, would do well to consult Cesare Cantù's *Storia della Città e Diocesi di Como* (3a edizione, 1899), and the *Storia di Como*, by Maurizio Monti (3 vols. 1829).

We cannot take leave of the Larian city without alluding to one of its greatest sons—Alessandro Volta, whose statue by Marchesi is one of the first objects which greets the visitor disembarking at Como from a voyage down the lake.

Alessandro Volta was a member of a noble Comasco family, and was born in 1745. Being as a child of a quiet and retiring nature, he was destined by his parents to enter the priesthood, and was actually placed under Jesuit direction with a view to his ultimately becoming a member of the Society of Jesus. Fortunately,

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however, for himself, for science, and for civilisation generally, he elected to tread the progressive rather than the retrograde path in life, and instead of becoming a theologian he became one of the chief pioneers of electrical research.

In 1774 he was appointed Professor of Natural Science at the University of Pavia. He was one of the first to experiment on the electric decomposition of water, and was the inventor of an electric battery and the voltaic pile bearing his name. His discoveries inaugurated a new era not only in electrical science, but also in chemistry. After retiring from his post at Pavia in 1804, he spent the remainder of his life in his native city of Como, where he actively pursued his studies and experiments, and died in 1826, having largely contributed to the development and progress of modern electrical research.

The city of Como is to-day one of the most flourishing towns in Northern Italy, and its silk manufactories, in the quality and texture of the silk they turn out, rival the best French houses. Indeed, the whole of the Comasco district is devoted to the rearing of silk-worms. The whole process of the cultivation of these creatures is very interesting to watch. Great is the anxiety felt in the villages above the shores of the Lake of Como if the season be a cold or backward one, and the temperature not high enough to cause the silk-worms to go through their various grades of evolution at the proper periods, which are calculated by the peasants almost to a day. In June the fore-decks of the steamers passing

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up the lake from Como are laden with huge bales which the ordinary travellers generally imagine to contain vegetables of some kind. They contain, however, mulberry leaves, stripped from the white mulberry-trees growing in the Lombard plain, on which the silk-worms are fed. Although the sight of these creatures at work is interesting, the smell, aggravated by the close, stuffy atmosphere of the places in which they are kept, is intensely unpleasant, and to some people nauseating.

CHAPTER XI

LAGO MAGGIORE

Locarno—Canobbio—Luino—The Castelli di Cannero—The Sasso del Ferro—Santa Caterina del Sasso—The Castle of Angera—Arona and San Carlo Borromeo—Cardinal Federigo Borromeo.

COMPARISONS being universally admitted to be odious, we cannot venture to attempt to draw any between the Lago di Como and that of its near neighbour, the Lago Maggiore, so far as their respective claims to superiority in natural beauty. To some the scenery of the Lake of Como stands supreme and unrivalled among the lakes of Northern Italy, and these find the Lago Maggiore lacking in the richness of colouring and peculiar beauty of atmosphere which the Larian Lake shares in common with the Lake of Garda.

To others the breadth and expanse of Lago Maggiore and its distant views appeal more forcibly than do the more contracted shores of the Lake of Como.

The question, so often argued, as to which of the two lakes is the more beautiful, must ever remain an open one; the answer to it depending as it does on individual taste and individual artistic perception. For



IN THE HEAT OF THE DAY.



TO THE
ATTENTION

Lago Maggiore

ourselves, we have no hesitation in giving our vote in favour of the Larian Lake, to which, together with the largest of all the Italian lakes, the Lago di Garda, we should always award the palm of beauty were we called upon to bestow it.

Whatever may be the differences of opinion as to the superiority or inferiority in point of scenic effects of the Lago Maggiore to the Lago di Como, there can be no question that in historic interest the Larian Lake possesses every advantage over its rival. The Lago Maggiore, indeed, is singularly lacking in the traditions of enterprise and adventure, in political and artistic associations which invest every portion of the Lake of Como with a fascination and a charm apart from, and yet at the same time subtly bound up with its natural beauties.

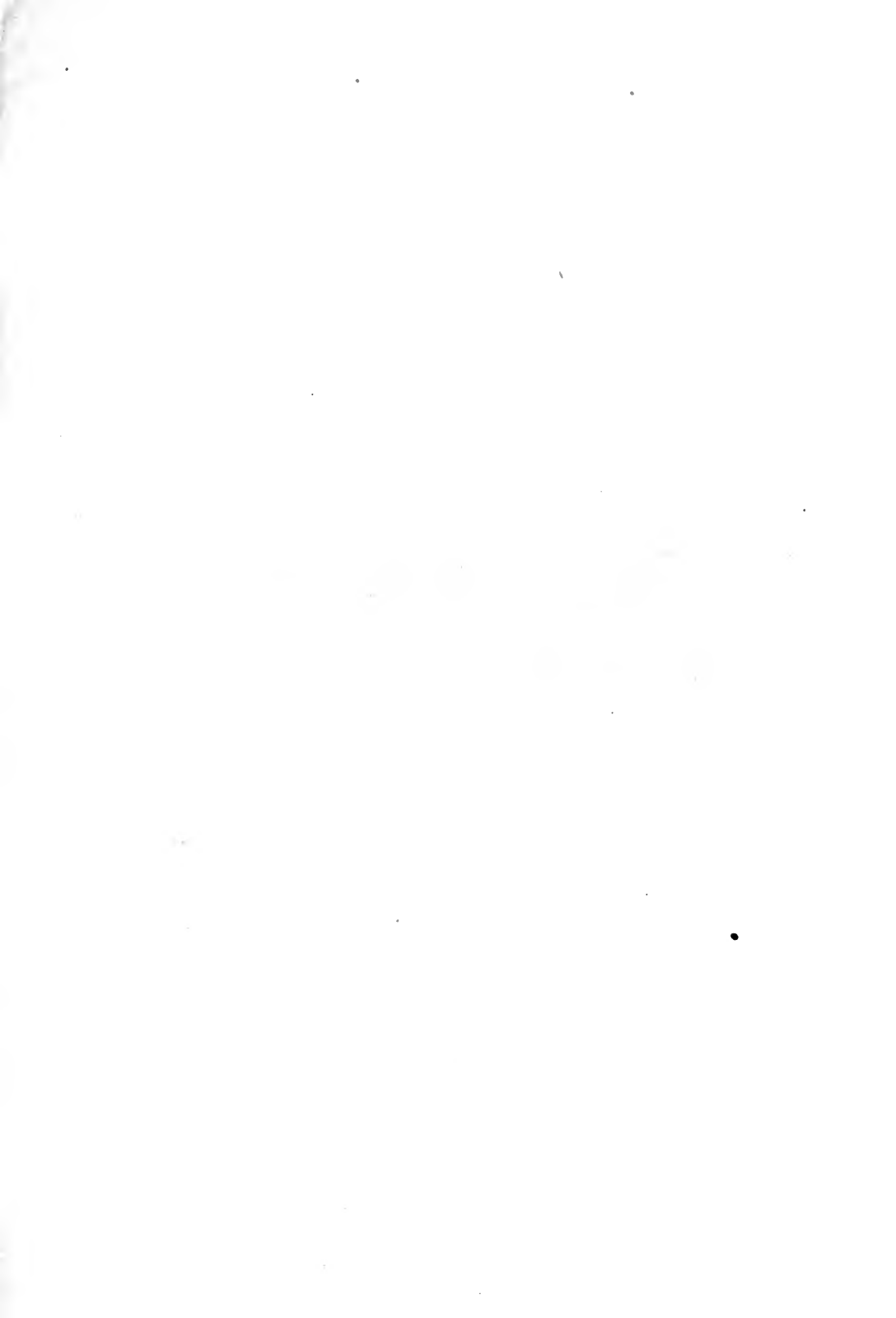
Some forty miles in length from Arona to Locarno, the Lacus Verbanus, as it was called by the Romans on account of its mild and spring-like climate, forms the great sub-Alpine basin into which flow the waters of the Ticino, the Toce, the Maggia, and the Tresa, which rivers leave the lake at its southern extremity under the common name of Ticino, the largest river in Italy next to the Po. The waterways to which Lago Maggiore may be said to be the entrance gate are indeed far reaching; and it is said by some mediæval writers to be due to the fact that vessels laden with merchandise from the north shipped at Bellinzona could reach the Mediterranean and Adriatic seas by the swift Ticino and the mighty Po, that the name of Maggiore was

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bestowed upon the lake, since it is by no means the largest in Italy, as is so often asserted by the guide-books. Another possible explanation of the term, we believe, might be found in a corruption of the name Maggia, the river to which allusion has already been made.

We will commence our tour of Lago Maggiore in Swiss territory, at the little town of Locarno, at the north-western extremity of the lake. Locarno is beautifully situated at the mouth of the Val Maggia, one of the most picturesque and fascinating of the mountain passes in this district. The name Locarno is the Italianised form of the Latin *Locarnum*, which name is said to be derived from *locus carniū*, a title by which the Romans expressed their appreciation of the excellence of the meat and the abundance of provisions supplied by its markets, advantages due to the rich pasturage afforded by the valleys behind the town, and to the mild, equable climate. During the winter months Locarno possesses a climate infinitely superior to that of the French and Italian Rivas, inasmuch as it is entirely free from the winds and dust of those much overrated health resorts, and enjoys almost perpetual sunshine during November, December, and January. Orange and lemon trees, myrtle and many semi-tropical shrubs and plants flourish here throughout the winter; and were Locarno in French hands, it would doubtless long ago have been converted into a thriving winter refuge.

As it is, Locarno remains a small and quiet little



LA MADONNA DEL SASSO, LOCARNO,
LAGO MAGGIORE



TO THE
LEGISLATIVE

Lago Maggiore

place, with one or two good hotels, and a convenient resting-place from which to make excursions into the lovely valleys at its rear, in each of which there is no lack of walks and drives of infinite variety, ranging through pastures and chestnut woods to glaciers and wild Alpine peaks, according to the distance covered by the traveller, his store of energy, and, we may add, of coin.

In the town of Locarno itself there is little of interest, and the expeditions to be made in its neighbourhood will probably be found, Irishly speaking, to be its chief attractions. The villages of Canobbio and Brissago, perched on the hillsides high above the lake, are worthy of a visit on account of the beautiful views to be obtained from them. In the church of the Pietà at Canobbio is a fine altar-piece by Ferrara, representing the Carrying of the Cross. From this village a high road runs to Domo d'Ossola, passing at first through the pastoral Val Canobbio, and afterwards through a wild and very picturesque country little frequented by the ubiquitous tourist.

The Val Orsenona should also be explored from Locarno, with its romantic glens, glades, and waterfalls. The Val Bavena and the Val Anzasca are among the most beautiful of the mountain valleys in this region, but both are difficult of access. A splendid view of Monte Rosa closes the vista at the head of the last-named pass.

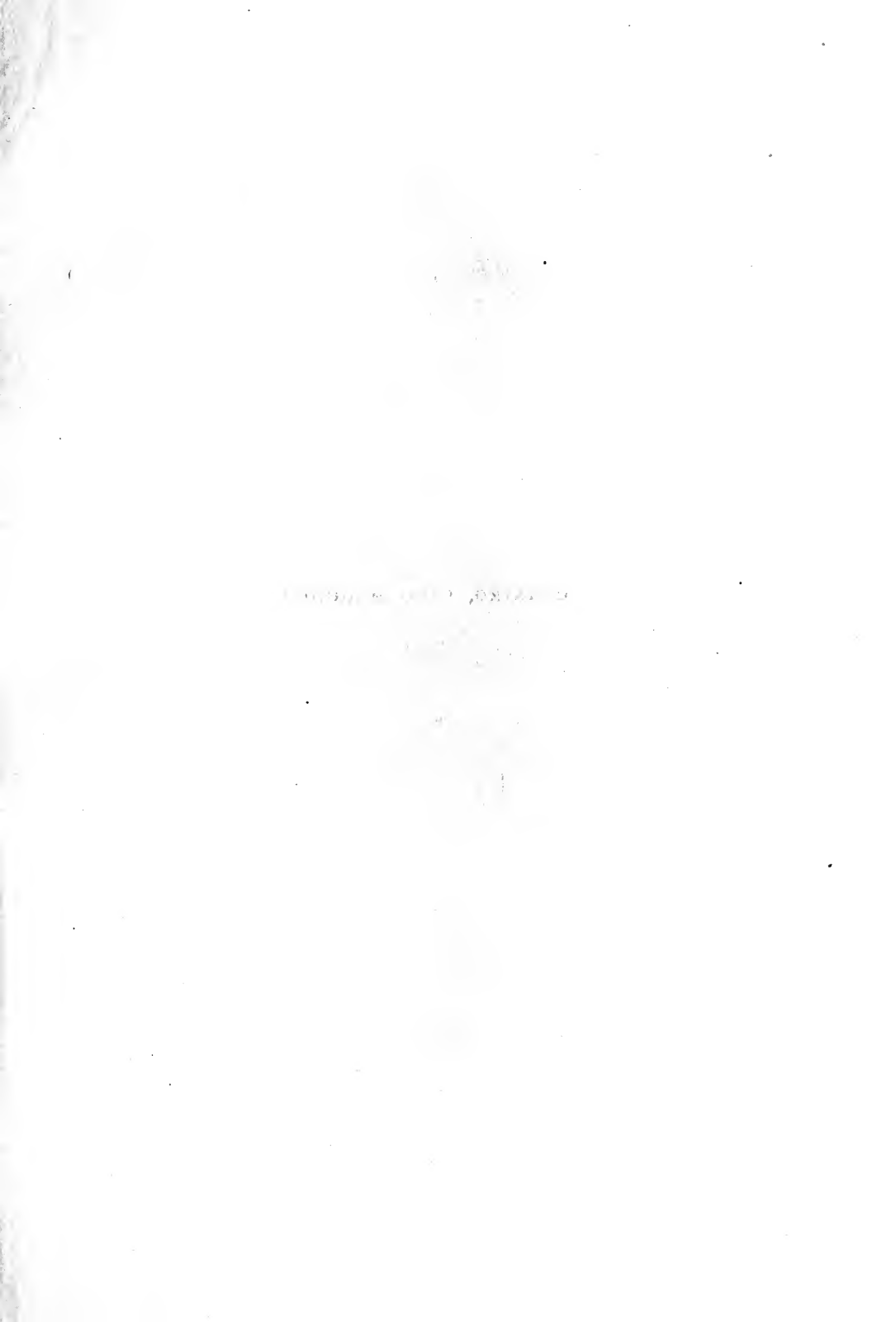
The pilgrimage church of the Madonna del Sasso, situated on the summit of a wooded hill about twelve

The Italian Lakes

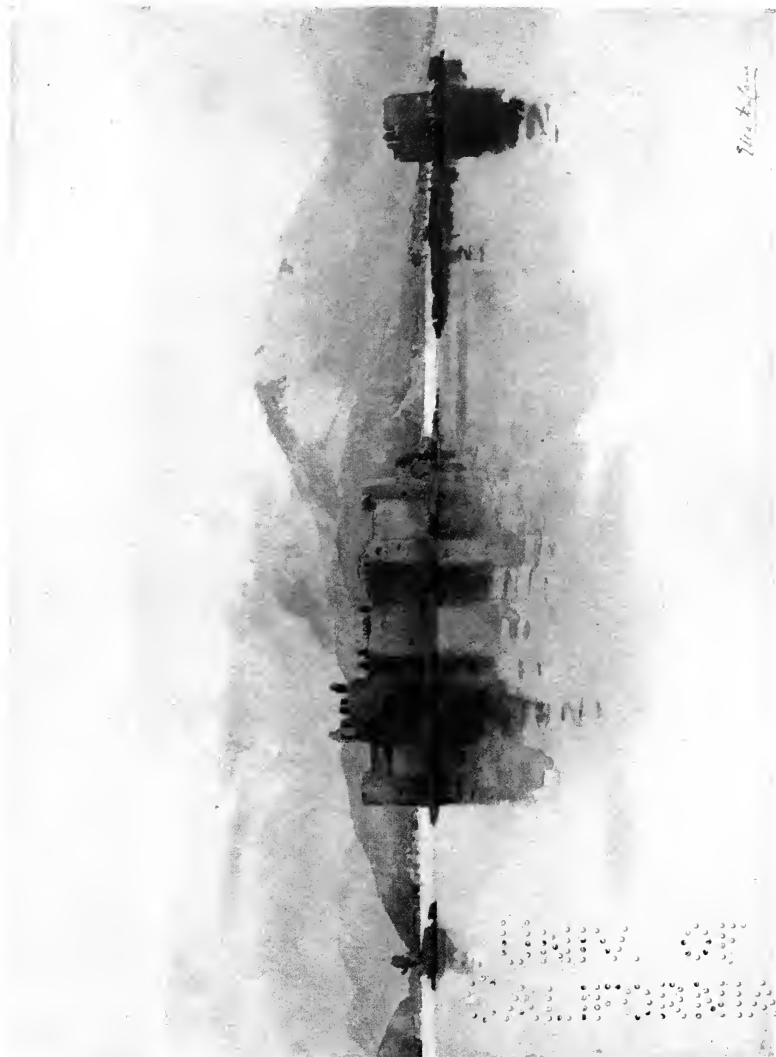
hundred feet above Locarno, commands a fine view of the lake.

The Madonna del Sasso is externally a far more picturesque edifice than the majority of the pilgrimage churches in the lake district of Northern Italy. Its façade and graceful open loggia, surmounted by the red-tiled campanile, form pleasing objects from the lake below, while the proportions of the building are singularly good. The sanctuary takes its name from the mass of rocky pinnacles on the summit of which it stands. The ascent to it from the little town is tolerably fatiguing on a hot summer day, but it is, nevertheless, well worth the trouble of undertaking, on account of the beautiful view over lake and mountains to be obtained from the piazza in front of the church. A "Descent from the Cross," by Cesare, is the only picture of note in this sanctuary.

On the opposite and eastern shore of the lake, at the mouth of the river Tresa, is the busy little town of Luino, which owes its prosperity mainly to silk factories and to the transit of merchandise passing to and from the St. Gothard Railway junction at Bellinzona. The place itself is chiefly interesting as being the birthplace of the great artist Bernardo Luini, who was born here in the year 1470. In the parish church are to be seen several of his frescoes, though they are by no means the most striking examples of his work. Luini's art is to be studied at its best in his masterpieces at Saronno, which town is within a short distance by rail from Como. Almost immediately opposite Luino, two ruined castles,



CANNERO, LAGO MAGGIORE



100 x 400

100 x 400

The figure consists of two parts. The top part shows a single hexagon with vertices labeled a through f . The bottom part shows a larger section of the lattice with vertices labeled a through s , illustrating the connectivity between adjacent hexagons.

Lago Maggiore

the Castelli di Cannero, rise from rocks in the lake. These fortresses were, in the fifteenth century, the retreats of a family of five brothers, by name Mazzardi, who were simply brigands, and in no way to be compared with the romantic and powerful Medeghino in his Castle of Musso on the Lake of Como.

Beyond the spacious beauty of the scenery, there is little to detain us in these upper waters of the Lago Maggiore, and it is not till we come to Laveno that the most attractive portions of the lake are reached.

Above this little town rises the grass-clad mountain called the Sasso del Ferro, some 3500 feet in height, from the summit of which is a fine view over the lake to the mighty peaks of Monte Rosa on one side, and across the plain of Lombardy to Milan on the other side. The ascent of this hill is perfectly easy, and takes somewhat under three hours to perform with comfort. In shape the Sasso del Ferro bears some resemblance to Vesuvius, though it altogether lacks the fine, sweeping outlines at its base possessed by the last-mentioned mountain. In the spring it is carpeted to its crest with wild flowers of every form and hue.

High up on the southern side of the mountain is perched the monastery known as Santa Caterina del Sasso, which may be said to be the most interesting spot on Lago Maggiore. The monastery was erected over the cell of a certain fourteenth-century fanatic of the name of Besozzo, who, in expiation of the sins of his earlier years, retired to a cave in the sides of the

The Italian Lakes

Sasso del Ferro, and here spent the remainder of his life as a hermit, subsisting on the charity of the public. The true interest of the place, however, apart from its picturesque site, consists in a strange natural phenomenon which, as was inevitable, has for long been accounted miraculous.

Inside the monastery church is a small chapel, over the altar of which hangs, sustained apparently by some invisible force, a huge block of rock arrested in its fall from the lofty precipice above the building. The singular position of this rock is ascribed by popular, if not by priestly fancy, as being due to the personal intervention of the Madonna, who checked the course of the detached block in its fall at the very moment when it threatened to overwhelm the altar at which mass was actually being celebrated. As a matter of fact the rock is maintained in its extraordinary position, not, as some zealous Protestants would like to believe, by artificial and therefore fraudulent means, but by a strange accident which caused the falling masses of rock to be jammed one against another, wedging one of the blocks into the masonry of the chapel, by which it has ever since continued to be supported. The effect is certainly most remarkable, and those in whom power of faith predominates over power of observation and reason may well be pardoned if they ascribe the hanging rock of Santa Caterina del Sasso to supernatural agency.

Nothing can be more picturesque and fascinating than the surroundings of this monastery. The arches

SANTA CATERINA, LAGO MAGGIORE



NO. 1000
APPROVED

Lago Maggiore

of its cloister frame a series of natural landscapes of supreme beauty. Hundreds of feet beneath lie the blue waters of the lake. Vines, wild fig-trees, geranium, oleander, grow in luxuriant profusion around the white buildings, and the eye travels over water and rock, forest and mountains, to the distant snow-capped Alps and the dazzling summit of Monte Rosa. If Lago Maggiore possessed Santa Caterina del Sasso and nothing else, it could still lay claim to the possession of a spot of rare and enchanting charm; and although we may permit ourselves emphatically to disagree with Mr. Ruskin's statement, uttered in his accustomed dogmatic style, that Maggiore is the most beautiful of the Italian lakes, we must confess that were there more places to be found upon it like Santa Caterina, his sweeping assertion would be open to less question.

From Laveno the southern shores of Lago Maggiore are comparatively flat and monotonous.

The castle of Angera, belonging to Count Borromeo, was formerly a fortress of considerable importance, and gave the title of Counts of Angera to the Visconti, Dukes of Milan, and afterwards to Cardinal Federigo Borromeo, nephew of San Carlo Borromeo. An ancient rhyme, similar to that connected with the towns of Bellano and Varenna on the Lake of Como, runs as follows :—

Scelga chi vuol' provare pene d'inferno
d'Estate Angera, ed Arona d'inverno.

Angera, facing due south, and thus being exposed to

The Italian Lakes

the full heat of the sun in summer ; while Arona, facing north, is equally cold during the winter months.

Arona, the next place of any interest or importance on this portion of the lake, was the birthplace of the famous San Carlo Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan, son of Count Giberto Borromeo and the Marchesa Margherita de' Medici, who, as we have already seen, was sister of the Comasco hero, Il Medeghino—Gian Giacomo de' Medici—and of Pope Pius IV.

San Carlo Borromeo may be said to be the presiding deity of Lago Maggiore. His colossal bronze and leaden statue, nearly seventy feet in height, and standing on a pedestal of some thirty feet high, towers over the surrounding country. This monument was erected in 1697, eighty-seven years after the death of the saint, who was canonised in 1584. The ascent into the head of the statue by means of ladders in the interior can be made by those who may be in search of a most unpleasant experience. The heat inside the great mass of metal is intense, should the sun be shining upon it, and a false step in passing from one of the ladders to another, which might easily be the result of sudden giddiness due to the heat, would be productive of a fall that must certainly be fatal. On a broiling July afternoon, when considerably stronger and more energetic, we were foolish enough to be persuaded into making the ascent into San Carlo's head, and we experienced a mild form of the tortures the saint was apt to counsel the authorities to inflict on the heretics of his day.

San Carlo Borromeo was the trusted counsellor of

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ANGERA, LAGO MAGGIORE



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Lago Maggiore

his maternal uncle, Pope Pius IV., and played a leading part in the deliberations of the Council of Trent. His heroic actions at Milan during the great famine and plague of 1570 and 1576 respectively are too well known to need repetition in these pages. His Christian charity, unluckily, did not extend itself to those whom the Court of Rome regarded as heretics, and letters are extant in which, as Cardinal Secretary of State, he urges the civil authorities of Lombardy and the seven Helvetic cantons, which he had formed into a league for the defence of the South, to greater severity against the Protestant sects. In one of these epistles he complains of the scarcity of executions, and demands that more heads of heretics should be sent to Rome. While regarding him as a great organiser and a courageous and ascetic churchman, it is no easy matter to accept his enumeration among those entitled to the "honours of the altar" and the halo of a saint; and those who, remembering the atrocities to which he was a party, visit the great Archbishop's shrine under the high altar in Milan Cathedral, and gaze on the body of San Carlo, arrayed in silks and jewels, will realise the ironies and absurdities of mediæval canonisations generally.

San Carlo's nephew, Count Frederick Borromeo, was also a cardinal and Archbishop of Milan from 1595 to 1691. Although he was not canonised by the Church, he is entitled to more respect than many saints, inasmuch as, among other noble and enlightened works, he founded during his archiepiscopacy the great Ambrosian Library at Milan.

CHAPTER XII

LAGO MAGGIORE

Stresa—Monte Motterone—Isola Bella—Isola Madre—The Isola dei Pescatori and San Giovanni—Pallanza—Intra.

THE little town of Stresa forms, without doubt, the most convenient headquarters for making excursions to the most interesting portions of the Lago Maggiore, and from it, moreover, the most picturesque general view of the lake is to be obtained. Baveno has, of course, gained greater notoriety among tourists from the accident of Queen Victoria having occupied the Villa Clara, which remarkably ugly building, so completely out of character with its surroundings, constitutes a veritable eyesore in the landscape.

At Stresa there are one or two fine villas with well-kept gardens, notably the Villa Pallavicino above the lake, the Villa Vignola, and that belonging to H.R.H. the Duchess of Genoa, mother of Queen Margherita of Italy. The great statesman, Count Cavour, resided much at Stresa, and it was here that he conceived his noble scheme of Italian unity and liberation.

The ascent of Monte Motterone, which rises behind



A GARDEN AT BAVENO, LAGO MAGGIORE



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Lago Maggiore

Stresa and Baveno, is well worth the making, especially in the months of May and June, when endless varieties of wild flowers, some among them of considerable rarity, are to be found on the different degrees of altitude. Though Motterone is over 4000 feet in height, the ascent is perfectly easy. From the summit the view is very extensive, though it cannot be compared with that most beautiful of all mountain views in North Italy—the panorama to be seen from Monte Generoso.

From Monte Motterone the chain of Alps can be followed from the Col di Tenda to Monte Viso to the south-west, and the great mass of Monte Rosa and the Ortler to the west, while to the east rise innumerable peaks, of which the Mischabel, the Jungfrau, and the Frischerhorn are the most prominent. The Lago d'Orta and six or seven smaller lakes, such as Mergosso and Varese, besides the whole of Maggiore itself, lie around the base of the mountain, and in the distance the blue plains of Lombardy and Piedmont, the Sesia and Ticino rivers looking like silver threads. A curious optical illusion makes the Lombard plain appear to be on a considerably higher level than the uplands immediately above it, and the rivers present the effect of flowing uphill. Motterone is in reality the highest point of the ridge of mountain called Mergozzolo, forming the division between the basins of the lakes Maggiore and Orta.

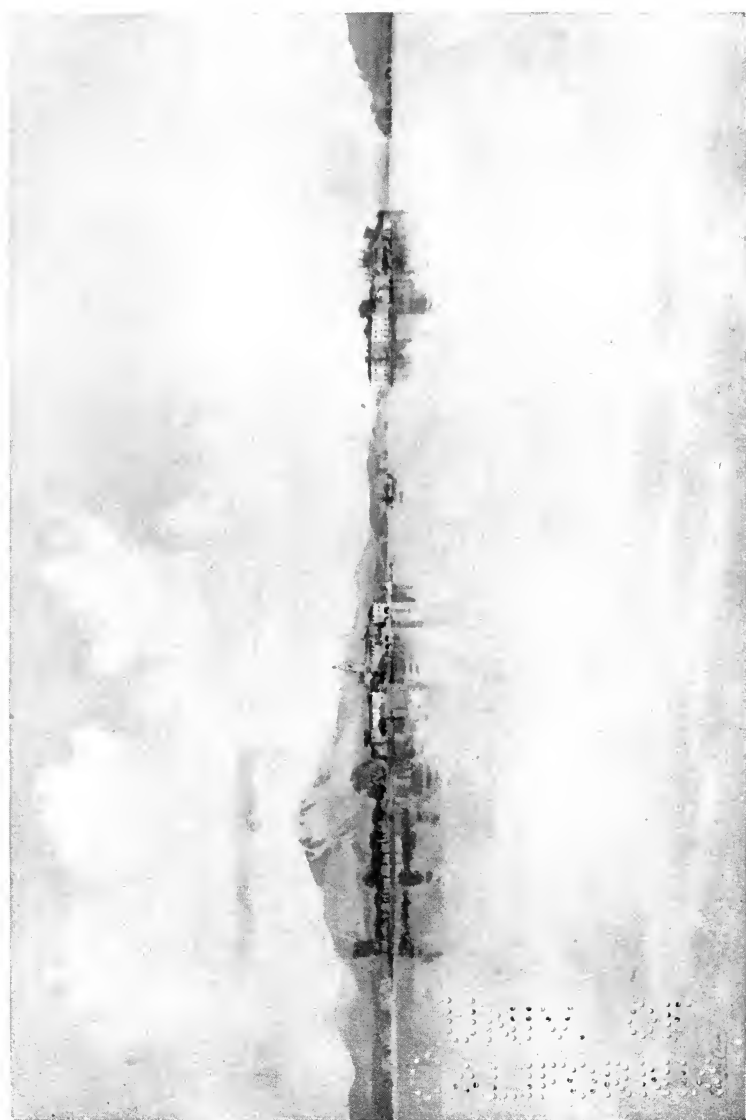
From Stresa a short row or drive brings us to Baveno, famous for its marble quarries, and, together with Pallanza, the tourist centre of Lago Maggiore.

The Italian Lakes

The chief popular attractions of Maggiore, the Borromean islands, are conveniently visited from Baveno. It must be confessed that, with the exception of the Isola Madre, distance decidedly lends enchantment to these far-famed spots, and they may be classified as belonging to that vast category aptly described as "tourist traps." The islands form indeed a charming feature in a view that without them would be somewhat monotonous, and when distance conceals the monstrous artificialities of the Isola Bella, and the squalor of the Isola dei Pescatori, or, to give it its original name, Isola Superiore, they are pleasing objects enough.

The Isola Bella and the Isola Madre belong to the Borromeo family, the first named of the two islands being one of the principal residences of Count Borromeo. The Isola Bella, originally a barren rock, was laid out in terraced gardens in the year 1671 by Count Vitaliano Borromeo. Ten terraces, one above the other, rise to a height of about a hundred feet above the lake, and above them is the palace. The gardens are a triumph of bad taste. Artificial grottos bristling with shells, terrible pieces of hewn stone, which it would be an offence to sculpture to term statuary, offend the eye at every turn. The vulgarity of the whole conception is redeemed by the luxuriance of the semi-tropical vegetation which, owing to the extreme mildness of the climate, flourishes in these islands, and by the beauty of the views across the lake, to be enjoyed from every angle of the terraces. The interior of the palace is little worth visiting. A gallery of very indifferent

ISOLA BELLA AND ISOLA PESCATORI,
LAGO MAGGIORE





Lago Maggiore

pictures, most of which, although palpable "copies" by inexperienced artists, are pompously labelled with such names as Tiziano, Leonardo da Vinci, Tintoretto, *et cetera*, is shown to tourists. The gallery comprises a possible dozen fair specimens of the Lombard school, but is certainly not worth visiting, unless as a means of taking refuge from a summer shower.

The Isola Madre, on the contrary, which has never acquired the popularity possessed by its rococo neighbour, the Isola Bella, is a delightful spot in which to wander about on a hot afternoon. Here nature is allowed a freer hand, and the result, compared with the vulgarities of Isola Bella, is eminently satisfactory. As on the Isola Bella, the gardens here are formed on terraces, seven in number, above which rises the unfinished and uninhabited villa-palace, deserted in favour of its more popular rival. Lemons, oranges, magnolia, myrtle, hibiscus, datura—every kind of gorgeous and sweet-smelling plant flourish here, and roses innumerable in colour and variety. Besides the gardens, the Isola Madre contains a few acres of park and woods in which cedar, eucalyptus, camphor, pepper, and other rare trees attain a great size, while the camellia here grows to huge dimensions. The Isola Madre is also the haunt of birds of all kinds, which are left undisturbed in its quiet recesses.

The Isola dei Pescatori, which is not, strictly speaking, one of the Borromean islands, furnishes endless subjects for an artist's canvas, and close to the shore at Pallanza is the smallest of the islands, that of San

The Italian Lakes

Giovanni, which, a few years ago, became the property of Mr. Capel Cure, who has published several novels in Italian under the name of Giacomo della Quercia.

The town of Pallanza has no great attraction, save perhaps that of its climate, which is singularly mild and equable during the winter and spring, though the place is disagreeably hot and glaring during the summer and early autumn months. It is said to derive its name from Pallas. The German element, however, is predominant at Pallanza, and those who object to the habits and manners of the Teutonic tourist will do well to avoid choosing this place as a centre from which to make excursions on Lago Maggiore. There are several interesting gardens at Pallanza, notably those belonging to the Marchese di Casanova, and the gardens of the Villa Franzosini at the neighbouring town of Intra.

One of the most striking villas on Lago Maggiore is l'Eremitaggio, at Pallanza, built only some five years ago by an American gentleman, Mr. Kaupe. Although of such recent erection, l'Eremitaggio is a perfect facsimile of an Italian villa-palace of the Renaissance period, and the whole scheme of reproduction has been carried out with admirable architectural and artistic skill. It is a relief to turn from a replica of the Wimbledon or Putney residence of a retired tradesman, such as the Villa Clara at Baveno presents to the eye of the visitor to Lago Maggiore, to this successful construction. The gardens of l'Eremitaggio, moreover, are laid out with the same good taste which characterises the villa they surround, and, unlike the usual villa gardens

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ISOLA PESCATORI FROM BAVENO,
LAGO MAGGIORE



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Lago Maggiore

on Maggiore, possess the additional charm and advantage of not being cut off from the shores by a dusty public road.

The small town of Intra is famous for the richness and fertility of the soil surrounding it. It is a busy little place, though its factories are, unfortunately, almost entirely in the hands of Swiss proprietors. Behind Intra is the picturesque Val Introgno, while there are various *points de vue* from which fine vistas of the Alps can be obtained. The promontory between Intra and Pallanza was formerly the site of a temple, dedicated to Venus, which shrine is now supplanted by a church, dedicated to a much less interesting personage called San Remigio.

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Lago Maggiore

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CHAPTER XIII

LAGO D'ORTA

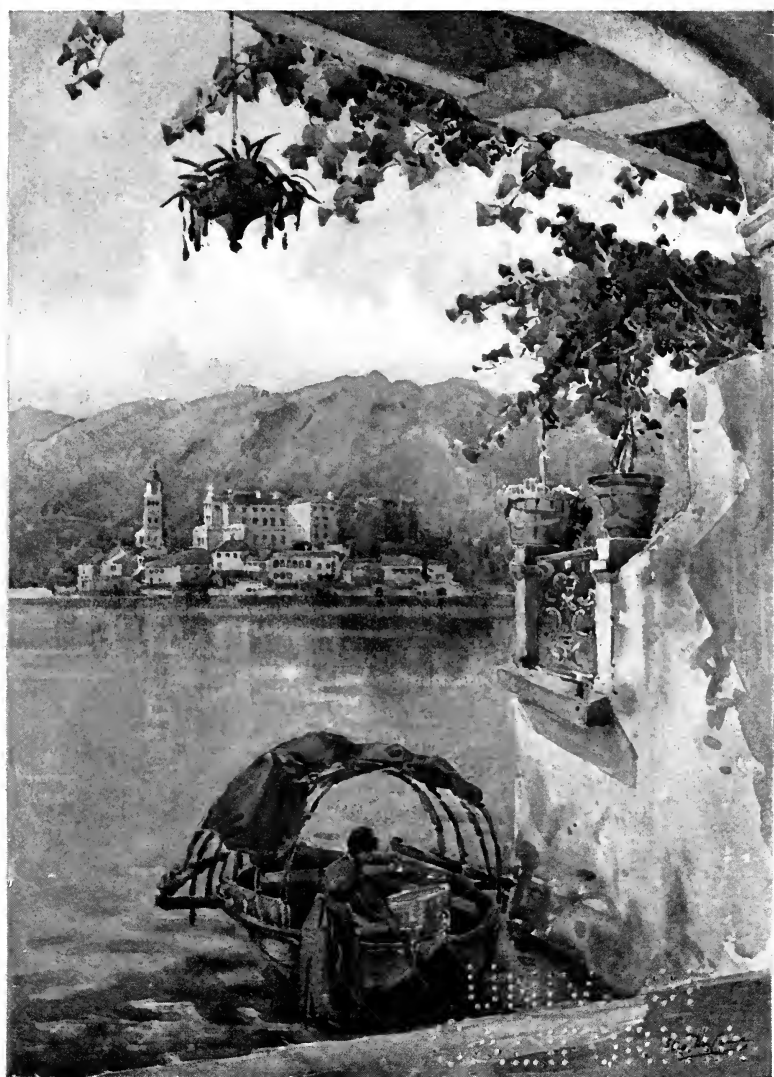
Position and scenery of the Lake—The town of Orta—Omeana—
The Sacro Monte—St. Francis of Assisi—The Isola di San
Giulio—The story of San Giulio—The island church—The
Col di Colma and Varallo.

ALTHOUGH insignificant in size when compared with its near neighbour, the Lago Maggiore, and with the lakes of Como and Lugano, the Lago d'Orta yields only to the Larian Lake in natural beauty, and far surpasses the two others in its wealth of colour and picturesque effects. It may be said, indeed, to be, with the exception of Como and Garda, the most typically Italian in its scenery and atmosphere of all the lakes in the northern provinces of Italy.

The name Lago d'Orta is of comparatively modern origin. Up to the middle of the sixteenth century the lake was known as the Lago di San Giulio, from the island and ancient church dedicated to that saint, presently to be described. The classical name of the Lago d'Orta was *Lacus Cusius*, by which title it was known to the Romans—the term *Cusius* being said to be derived from *Iceni*, an Iberian tribe which had



AN ARCHWAY AT ORTA



The figure consists of two parts. The top part shows a single hexagon with its six nearest neighbors. The bottom part shows a larger section of the lattice with various sites highlighted by different symbols: open circles, filled circles, and crosses. Some sites are labeled with letters like 'a', 'b', 'c', 'd', 'e', 'f', 'g', 'h', 'i', 'j', 'k', 'l', 'm', 'n', 'o', 'p', 'q', 'r', 's', 't', 'u', 'v', 'w', 'x', 'y', 'z'.

Lago d'Orta

settled on its shores some two or more centuries before the Christian era.

Travellers by the railway from Novara on their way to Arona and Lago Maggiore have but little idea of the beauties of the Lake of Orta, as they look down upon its waters from the train which passes at a considerable height above it. The fame of Maggiore has long eclipsed the more modest, but, as many think, the far more picturesque and sympathetic Orta, lying buried in the midst of its circle of lofty, wooded hills. But the majority of travellers through the Italian lake country hurry on to Baveno and the Borromean islands, or to Pallanza and its German hotels and *Biergartens*. It is to be hoped that they may long continue to do so, and to leave the Lago d'Orta the tranquil, secluded spot that, in spite of the railway, it yet remains.

The Lago d'Orta is, technically speaking, a Piedmontese and not a Lombard lake, since all but a very small portion of it lies within the province of Novara. Its length is something over twelve kilometres; so that it is, in comparison with the neighbouring lakes, of insignificant dimensions. What Orta may lose in length and breadth, however, is amply made up to it in beauty. At whatever season of the year this lake be visited, it presents, always granted that the day be a fine one, a charming and sympathetic picture. In late spring, summer, and autumn the colouring is superb. In the little town of Orta itself, as, indeed, at Omegna, Buccione, and each village around the lake, the eye is met by a blaze of colour at every turn. Masses of

The Italian Lakes

scarlet geranium and cactus, of clematis, roses, lilies, and the lovely mauve-tinted flowers of the caper, tumble in luxuriant profusion over walls and picturesque loggie, and these loggie as likely as not are shaded by awnings of rich red or apricot hue which add to the general brilliancy. If we glance upwards, it is to look into a sky of deepest blue ; if our eyes wander down narrow streets, it is to meet such patches of colour as are supplied by fruit-stalls laden with water-melons, peaches, gourds, tomato—or to give the last their more characteristic Italian name, *poma d'oro*. These if it be high summer. If it be spring, their place is taken by strawberries, cherries, and the fresh green of vegetables ; if it be autumn, by figs and grapes, purple and white. In all the Italian lake country there is no spot so redolent of Italy as Orta. Even the waters of the lake are more transparent and of a deeper blue than any others in North Italy, excepting those of the Lago di Garda. According to analytical statistics, indeed, taken some twenty years ago, the water of the Lago d'Orta is said to be the purest of all the lake waters, and this, and not merely atmospheric effects, probably accounts for its limpidity.

Unlike Maggiore and Como, the Lago d'Orta has few rivers flowing into its basin, and these are of insignificant volume compared with such mighty streams as the Ticino and the Adda. On the other hand, the lake is supplied by numerous subaqueous springs of purest quality which burst out of its rocky bed. It was not until the year 1883, during a drought in

A STREET AT ORTA



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Lago d'Orta

which the lake fell to a very low level, consequent on the streams being dry for many weeks, that the number and volume of these springs were realised. The only stream of any size flowing out of the Lago d'Orta is the Nigoglia, which, leaving the lake at the northern end, at Omegna, joins the Toce and ultimately the Po.

In all other instances the rivers flow from the southern extremity of the Italian lakes, the Lago d'Orta being the only one to discharge a stream from its northern end. Hence the Omegnesi have a saying concerning their own peculiar river the Nigoglia, which we quote in its dialectic form :—

La Niguja la va in su
E la legg'a la fêmon nù ;

which in Italian would run thus—

La Nigoglia va all' insù, e la legge la facciamo noi.

“The Nigoglia runs upward, and we make the law” (which causes it to perform this unnatural feat).

The Lake of Orta abounds with fish ; the trout especially being of excellent flavour, pink fleshed as salmon, and reaching a large size, the larger specimens ranging from twelve to twenty, and even twenty-five pounds in weight.

Pike, tench, and large perch are also plentiful, as well as the agoni—those delicately flavoured little fish which are to be found in all the neighbouring lakes, though those of the Lake of Como are by far the best so far as the eating of them is concerned. The official

The Italian Lakes

list of the various fish to be found in the Lake of Orta enumerates fourteen different kinds—a list which is, of course, headed by the magnificent trout yielded by these waters.

Unfortunately, from the fly-fisherman's point of view, these trout can seldom be prevailed upon to rise at a fly. But any fisherman who chooses to devote a few weeks at the proper seasons to negotiating matters with the *Salmo lacustris* of Orta would, we feel convinced, meet with occasional compensation for those blank days which, we fear, would not be few or far between, unless he should condescend to baser arguments than those supplied by the artificial fly.

Above the town of Orta stands the Sacro Monte, a thickly-wooded hill on the summit of which are pleasantly shaded walks and grassy glades, and from which charming views are to be obtained both of the lake and the open country. The Sacro Monte is, of course, a resort for pilgrimages, and up the sides of the hill, along the path leading to the church at its summit, are the usual shrines containing sculptural groups and representations of sacred scenes common to all Sacri Monti in this district.

The Sacro Monte of Orta, however, presents a pleasant contrast with those of other similar shrines, inasmuch as the little chapels contain representations of scenes from the life of St. Francis of Assisi instead of the usual painful and sometimes revolting representations of the different episodes of the Crucifixion, or other subjects of a similar disagreeable and unedifying

Lago d'Orta

nature. There are at Orta twenty-two of these chapels on the Sacro Monte, each of which contains a group of life-sized figures in terra-cotta of human beings and animals, and the more legendary side of the life of St. Francis of Assisi is depicted in its varying phases with considerable realism, though not with equal artistic taste. It is something, however, to be spared the horrors which seem to appeal so pleasurably to the pious imagination, and following in the terra-cotta groups at Orta the vicissitudes of St. Francis, we feel that we are at least permitted a glimpse at the gentler and more humane side of Christianity of which the Saint of Assisi was so ardent and so glorious an upholder.

But the chief attraction of the Lago d'Orta, apart from the peculiar charm of its tranquil beauty, is undoubtedly the Isola di San Giulio, the solitary island lying in the middle of the lake opposite the town. This picturesque island may be said to be unique among the lake islands in North Italy for the beauty of its form, the colouring of its rocks and its vegetation, and the grouping of its ancient buildings. The aggressive vulgarity of the Isola Bella on Maggiore becomes more than ever apparent when we look at the graceful Isola di San Giulio.

The island is practically covered with buildings from the water's edge to its summit, which is crowned by a large seminary forming part of the ancient fortress. Nevertheless, gardens blazing with red and white oleanders, and fragrant with roses and magnolia, seem to fill every available spot between the houses, while

The Italian Lakes

drooping willows and purple-blossomed catalpas, wild vines and flowering creepers, cactus and geranium, growing to the very edge of the lake, are reflected in its clear, blue depths. A single narrow street winds round the base of the island—a street every few yards of which presents some new picture, some fresh combination of detail and colour.

As long ago as the year 390 A.D. the Isola di San Giulio, according to history, first became inhabited. During the reign of the Emperor Theodosius, one Julius, a missionary priest sent from Rome to Novara, passed through Orta. He was so struck by the solitary beauty of the little island reposing on the bosom of the lake that he resolved to found a sanctuary upon it. At this point we pass, for the moment, from history into myth. Ecclesiastical legend declares that, owing to the fearsome nature of the monsters, dragons, serpents of huge size and poisonous breath, and such-like denizens, no man had as yet been bold enough to set foot on the island in the Cusian lake, nor could Julius prevail upon any inhabitant of the mainland to convey him thither in a boat.

The ardour of the future saint, however, was not to be damped by so trifling an inconvenience as the lack of a proper conveyance to carry him over the lake. Using his cloak as a sail and his staff as a rudder, he walked on to the surface of the waters and, the wind filling his cloak, was promptly blown across to the island. On his landing, the impenetrable brushwood which covered the ground miraculously receded and

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ISOLA SAN GIULIO, LAGO D'ORTA



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Lago d'Orta

opened out a path for him, while the monsters fled before his face and, abandoning the island, retreated into the mountains on the mainland.

This and similar myths are so clearly suggestive of the truths they conceal, and of the facts to which they owe their origin, that it can only be a matter of regret that these truths should be brought into doubt and evil repute by those who insist on supplying the demand of the superstitious and the ignorant for the miraculous, and encourage belief in the letter rather than in the spirit of such legends. A very ordinary fossil bone, probably that of a whale, is still solemnly shown to the faithful at San Giulio as the remains of one of the monsters who fled before the patron saint of the island.

Julius, to revert to history, founded a church upon the island, and in the space of two years (392 or 393) died, and was buried there. In the year 1637 his body was removed and reinterred in the present church.

This building is said to date back to the seventh century, and is in form a complete basilica on a miniature scale.

It contains several monuments of interest, and among them a curious pulpit of the eighth or ninth century, on which divers weird beasts, possibly representing those driven from the island by San Giulio, are sculptured. A marble sarcophagus, now used as an alms' box, is supposed to have originally contained the remains of one Mernulphus, governor of the island in 575, who was beheaded for treachery by the Lombard King Agilulf. The letters, Mernul, still remain,

The Italian Lakes

and the headless skeleton of a man was found within the sarcophagus when it was discovered in 1697.

A curious record of past events is, or was, preserved on the walls of this church. It consists of notes written at random, much in the same way as modern tourists cut or write their names and the dates of their inroads upon show places. Plagues, earthquakes, floods, miracles, and similar occurrences are thus chronicled. Mr. T. Lund observes that these records left by unknown hands go back to the year 1421, and are to be found scrawled upon the pillars and arches of the building.

A few pictures of indifferent merit, and of more than doubtful authenticity, are contained in the church, and among other treasures in the sacristy is a charter of the Emperor Otho, dated 962, granting certain land to the clergy of the church of San Giulio as a thankoffering for a victory gained by him over Berengarius, King of Italy, who had seized Orta from the Bishops of Novara. The Bishops of Novara, it may be mentioned, were feudal lords of Orta and of what was termed the Riviera di Orta up to late in the eighteenth century, and it is curious to read of dire pains and penalties threatened by the episcopal court of Novara in 1787 on any individual who either publicly or privately should venture to call the lake by any other name than that of Lago di San Giulio—the term Lago d'Orta being held to convey want of proper respect to religious tradition and, no doubt, to clerical authority.

The whole neighbourhood of Orta is admirably

THE CAMPANILE OF SAN GIULIO,
LAGO D'ORTA



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Lago d'Orta

adapted for excursions both on foot and on wheels. By far the most beautiful excursion, however, is that across the Col di Colma to Varallo, in the Val Sesia.

Almost opposite the town of Orta, nestling in chestnut woods on the other shore of the lake, is the pretty little village of Pella, whence a roadway leads up through woods, and by a stream—the Pellino—which turns picturesque old mills, to La Colma, a village situated nearly a thousand metres above sea level. The views from this place are enchanting, Monte Rosa as usual towering in the distance above the intervening mountain ranges, while immediately below are the lakes of Orta and Varese, and beyond the latter the plain of Lombardy.

The descent into the Val Sesia from La Colma is extremely beautiful, affording every variety of scenery, from the pastoral meadows gay with wild flowers of every hue and quiet woodland glades to the snow-clad peaks of the Alps.

The town of Varallo itself is delightfully situated in the centre of the Val Sesia. Being the native place of the painter, Gaudenzio Ferrari, the churches here contain some fine examples of his work.

Like Orta, Varallo also boasts its Sacro Monte, the most attractive characteristic of which are the view from the summit and the fine trees through which the road thither takes us. From Varallo excursions may easily be made into some of the most beautiful of the various valleys, which have at their head Monte Rosa with its eternal snows.

CHAPTER XIV

BERGAMO AND LAGO D'ISEO

Bergamo—The Fiera di S. Alessandro—The legend of S. Alessandro—Bergamasque painters—The old town—The Broletto—The Duomo—Santa Maria Maggiore—Donizetti—The Cappella Colleoni—Bartolommeo Colleoni—The Castle of Malpaga—The Accademia Carrara—The Val Seriana—Lovere and the Lago d'Iseo.

A SHORT journey by train from Lecco, on the Lake of Como, brings us to one of the most interesting and picturesque cities in the Lombard Lake district—a city which is far too little known by the majority of visitors to the Lake of Como, although it is in such close vicinity. Apart, also, from its own attractions, Bergamo forms a convenient point from which to visit the beautiful Lago d'Iseo, which is almost twenty-five miles distant from it.

The country between Lecco and Bergamo is most fascinating. One rich and fertile valley succeeds another; and whether we drive or trust ourselves to that unpunctual and dirty mode of conveyance, an Italian railway, we pass through a district remarkable even in Lombardy for its luxuriant vegetation and wealth of agriculture.

Bergamo and Lago d'Iseo

The older portion of the town of Bergamo occupies a commanding position on the summit of one of the last of the mountain spurs which seem to stretch like promontories into the sea of the Lombard plain. The modern town, by far the larger of the two, lies in the plain beneath the ancient city, and does not greatly differ from other modern Italian provincial centres. The old town, however, is one of the most charming and interesting of all the cities of Northern Italy ; and there are few spots in the immediate neighbourhood of the lakes that better repay a day or two devoted to their exploration than this quaint, old-world Bergamo.

The modern quarter beneath the hill does not contain very much to detain us. A great open space called the Prato stands in the centre of it, from which streets radiate in all directions. This square is the scene of a huge fair, which is held annually at Bergamo, and known as the Fiera di Sant' Alessandro. It lasts for a whole month, beginning on St. Bartholomew's day. The Fair of Bergamo is a most ancient institution, and is said to have been held every year without an interruption from 913 A.D.

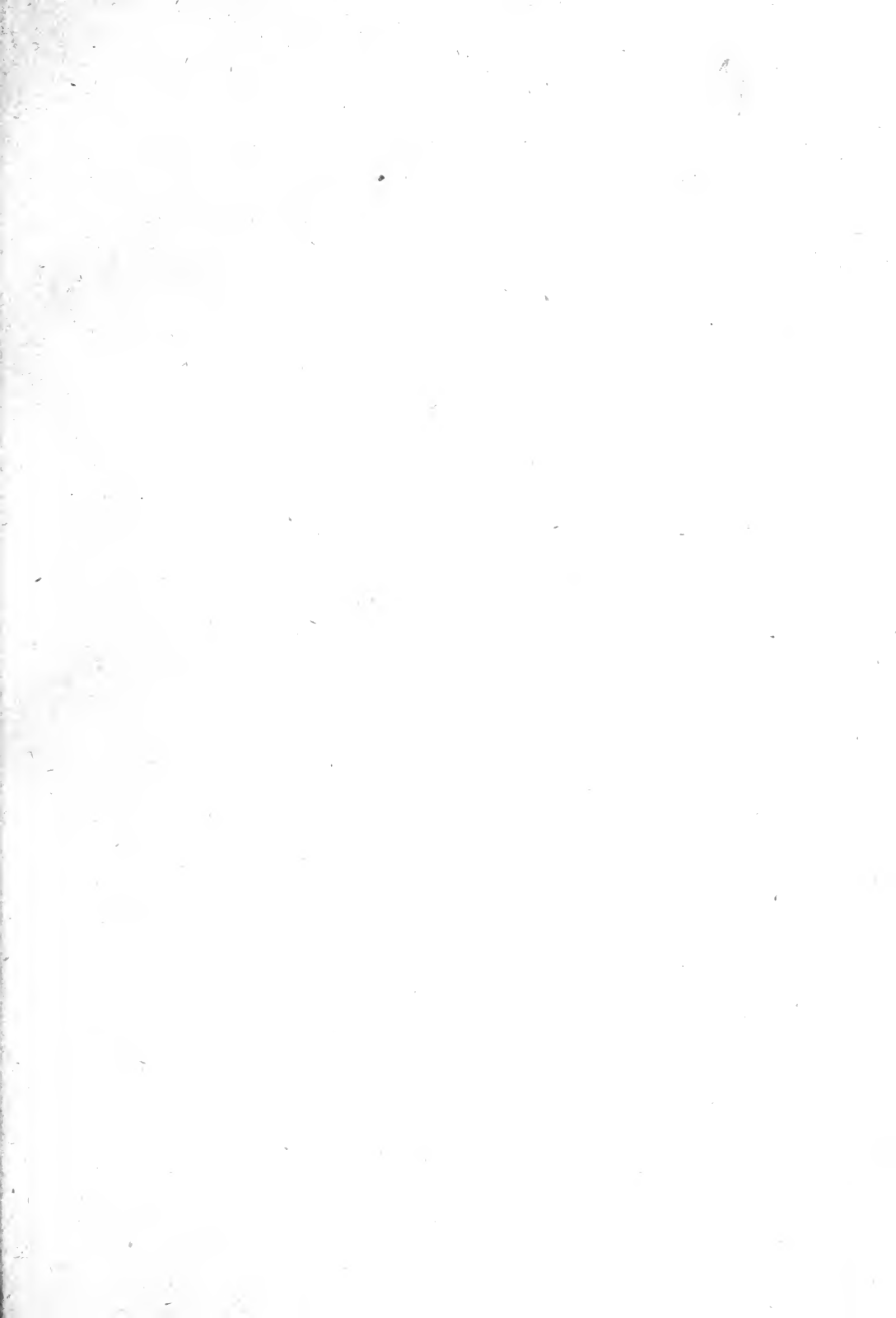
S. Alessandro, it may be mentioned, is a patron saint of Bergamo, and was martyred for refusing, as standard-bearer, to lead a Roman legion ordered to exterminate a colony of Gallic Christians. This legion, called the Theban legion, consisted entirely of Christians, and was despatched into Gaul in 286 A.D. by Maximian, who is said to have concealed the fact from its leaders and their men, that their services were to be employed

The Italian Lakes

against their co-religionists. Historians assert that the whole legion was massacred by order of Maximian for this insubordination, but the story, like many other early Christian tales of wholesale persecutions of their faith, is doubtless much exaggerated, since a Roman general would scarcely deprive himself of nearly seven thousand men unnecessarily. Nevertheless, the bones of the martyred legion are shown in a church in Cologne !

In the churches of S. Alessandro, S. Bartolommeo, and the San Spirito, all of which are in this lower town, there are some good pictures of the Bergamasque school by Lorenzo Lotto, Previtali, and the famous portrait painter Moroni, who was a native of Bergamo ; and some of whose finest works are, of course, familiar objects in our National Gallery, as well as in some of our country houses in England.

A broad street, the inevitable Via Vittorio Emanuele, and a funicular railway, lead up to the old town, or the città, as it is called, and once inside its gates and bastions the traveller might feel that he had left modern Italy behind him. But, alas ! the execrable taste of modern official Italy offends the eye and the sense of the fitness of things, even in the very heart of mediæval Bergamo. In the old piazza of the city, under the shadow of majestic old palaces, stands one of the usual offences to sculpture in the shape of a statue to Garibaldi, and the piazza now bears the name of the nineteenth-century adventurer. It is a relief to turn the eyes from it to the Palazzo Vecchio, or



A SUMMER EVENING, LAGO MAGGIORE



90 1880
1880 1880

Bergamo and Lago d'Iseo

Broletto, a stately Gothic edifice supported by columns and graceful arches. A statue of the poet Tasso, who, though born at Sorrento, was of Bergamasque origin, also stands in the piazza, with far better right to do so than its neighbour.

Behind the Broletto is the Cathedral, and, close beside this last, the beautiful church of Santa Maria Maggiore and chapel of the Colleoni.

The Cathedral of Bergamo is uninteresting. It was badly restored in 1689, and its interior is disappointing. It contains one or two mediocre paintings, and besides these a Madonna by Moroni, and another Madonna by G. Bellini forms the altar-piece behind the high altar, while in the sacristy is a work by Lorenzo Lotto.

The neighbouring Santa Maria Maggiore far better repays a visit. This church, which is in the Romanesque style, was commenced in 1137, and is almost entirely of marble. The northern entrance is particularly imposing. Broad steps, of black and white marble alternately, lead up to a porch which rests on columns of red marble springing from the backs of lions. Above the porch we see S. Alessandro between two other saints, and above him again the Madonna and Child under a marble canopy. Round the portals marbles of every hue are interlaced with rich foliage and traceries, while flowers and vines enframe grotesque hunting scenes, among which is one representing an individual who is climbing a tree in the attempt to catch a small bird in its branches. All the entrances to this church are rich in architectural designs and

The Italian Lakes

fancies, though this northern portal is more lavishly decorated than the others. The interior of Santa Maria Maggiore is very striking, and ancient tapestries hanging from its walls have an unusual and very pleasing effect. These tapestries conceal far more ancient frescoes, most of which have nearly perished. In the choir are some splendid examples of old Italian intarsiatura, or inlaid wood-work, for which Bergamo was noted. This work in the choir stalls was executed by a famous Bergamasque artist, Capodiferro, in the sixteenth century, and represents a series of scriptural legends and scenes.

Lovers of Donizetti's operatic music will be interested in finding a monument to him in this church. Donizetti was a native of Bergamo, as was the master under whom he studied, Giovanni Simone Mary, to whom a monument has also been erected near to that of his famous pupil.

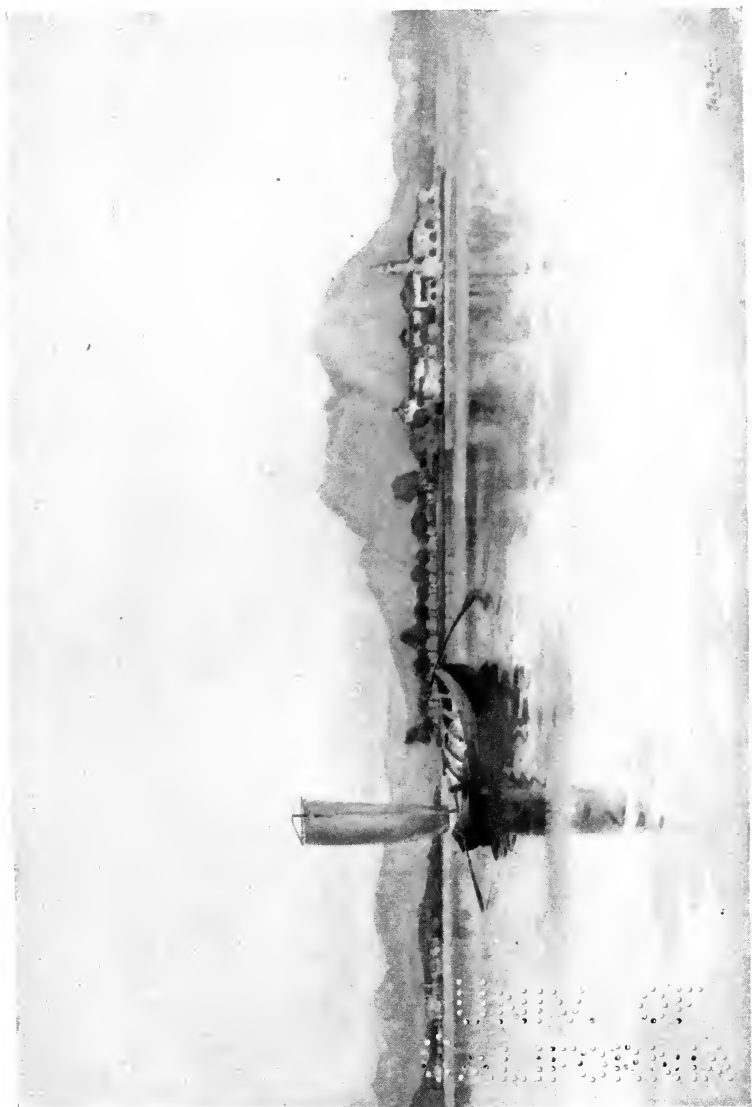
But still more interesting than Santa Maria Maggiore, both from an historical and an artistic point of view, is the beautiful little Cappella Colleoni which stands beside it, and indeed once formed the sacristy of the church.

This chapel is the resting-place of the great condottiere Bartolommeo Colleoni, Captain-General of the Venetian army, who caused the original sacristy of Santa Maria Maggiore to be converted into a mausoleum for himself and his daughter Medea.

Bartolommeo Colleoni was born at Bergamo in 1400, and was the son of an old Bergamasque house of Guelfic traditions. Early in life he determined, like many

THEORY OF THE EARTH

ISOLA PESCATORI, LAGO MAGGIORE



Bergamo and Lago d'Iseo

other restless spirits of his day, to win fame and wealth as a condottiere, or soldier of fortune. To follow his history is unnecessary, for it differs little from that of other military adventurers, who found ample opportunities of making a career by selling their services and experience of warfare to the rulers of the different Italian states, who were in a perpetual state of feud one against the other.

Those who are acquainted with Venice will remember the superb equestrian statue of Bartolommeo Colleoni outside the Scuola di San Marco, modelled by the Florentine Verocchio and cast in bronze by Leopardi, for the erection of which Colleoni left a sum of money in his will, with the direction that the monument should be placed in the Piazza San Marco, which direction, however, was ignored by the Venetian Government of the day, who made an equivocal compromise by erecting it in the Piazza della Scuola di San Marco instead of in the Piazza San Marco itself. A travesty of this statue, executed in gilded wood by some unknown artist, mars the interior of the Colleoni Chapel at Bergamo, where it has been placed over the tomb of the warrior.

This tomb is very elaborate, and consists of two sarcophagi, raised one above the other on columns supported by couchant lions, and richly sculptured. The ornamentation of the tomb, as of the chapel generally, is the work of Omodeo.

Close to Bartolommeo Colleoni's tomb is that of his young daughter, Medea Colleoni, who died at the age

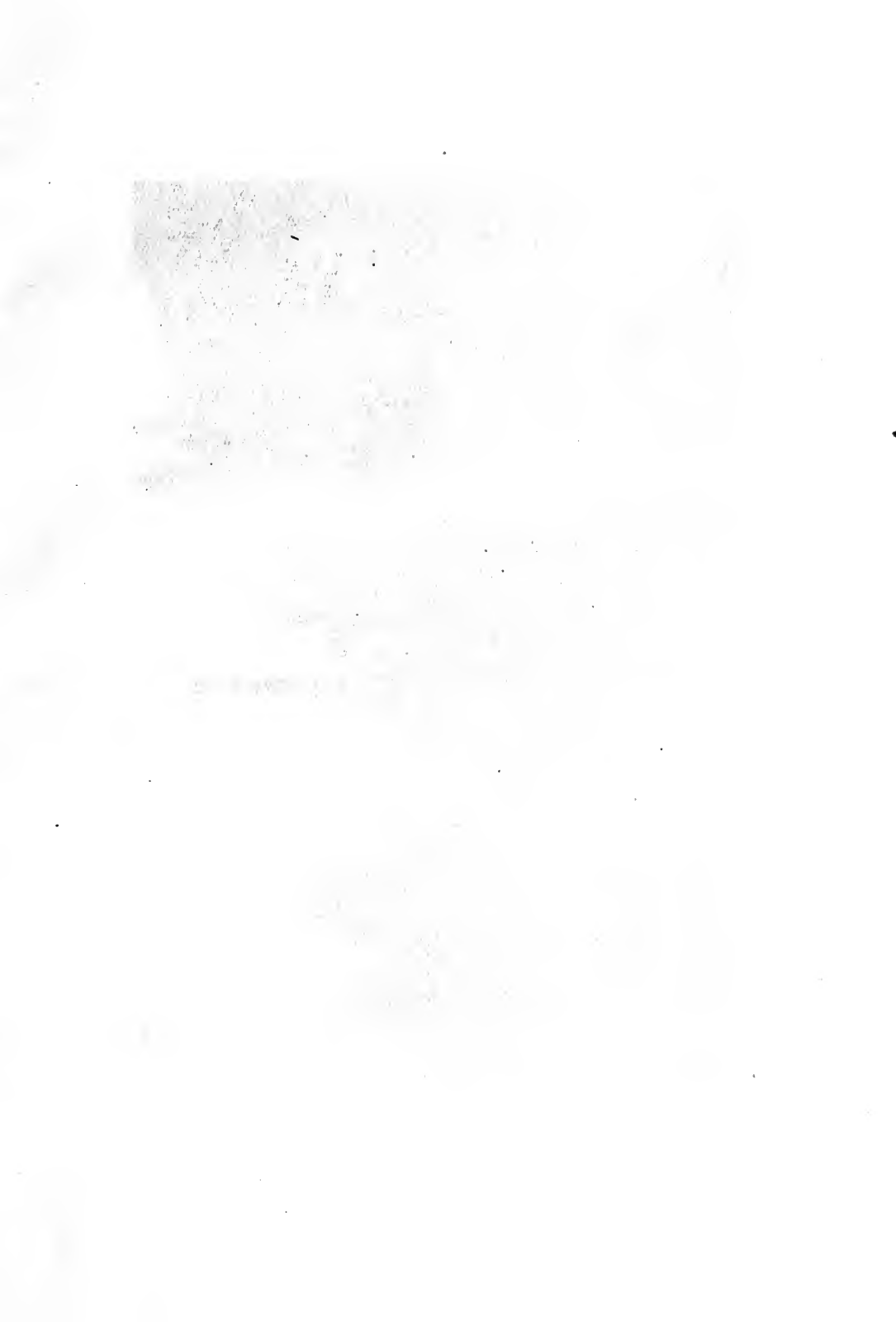
The Italian Lakes

of sixteen. The recumbent figure of the girl is very striking in its simple and pathetic grace. The skeleton of a small bird was found beside the body when the tomb was removed, in 1842, from the Dominican church of Santa Maria di Basella, where it was originally designed and erected by Omodeo by Bartolommeo Colleoni's order.

The external façade of the Colleoni chapel is a maze of rich, though harmonious and unextravagant ornamentation wrought in coloured marbles, and a particularly light and graceful rose-window completes its artistic beauty. The badge of the Colleoni, two lions' heads joined by a circlet of iron, is everywhere to be seen among the decorations, both inside and outside the chapel, as is also another and grosser device recalling the popular Italian use of the term *colleoni*.

Those who can devote the time to the excursion should drive to Malpaga, the old castle of the Colleoni, some ten miles from Bergamo on the road to Brescia. Malpaga is an unusually fine example of the mediæval Italian fortress-castle, and although neglected and used as a farmhouse, remains very much as it was when Bartolommeo Colleoni lived in it. It compares even with Bracciano, the great fortress of the Orsini near Rome, for size and massive strength, and could be made a most imposing residence were some rich man to buy and restore it.

The attractions of Bergamo, however, are by no means confined to churches and mortuary chapels. On the ramparts and bastions of the old city delightful



IN THE GARDEN, ISOLA BELLA,
LAGO MAGGIORE



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Bergamo and Lago d'Iseo

walks may be taken under avenues of plane and chestnut trees, and from every side beautiful views of mountain and valley, and of the fertile plain beneath, may be obtained.

Those who are interested in pictures will find in the Accademia a varied collection of paintings of the Lombard, Venetian, and of the Bergamasque schools ; three great private galleries, the Carrara, Morelli, and Lochis having been bequeathed by their owners to the city and housed in the Accademia. Delightful expeditions may also be made from Bergamo into the recesses of the Valle Seriana, through which the rapid Serio forces its way down from the mountains. Up the valley is Ponte della Selva, and nearer its head the beautiful falls of the Serio and the lovely lake of Barbellino, situated some four thousand feet above sea-level in a wild and picturesque district.

Brescia, too, is another city which may be easily visited from Bergamo, but which lies outside the field to which the present volume is limited.

A drive through twenty-five miles of beautiful country brings us to Lovere, a picturesque little town situated at the head of the Lago d'Iseo. Iseo and its lake can equally be reached by train from Bergamo and Brescia alike ; but the drive, with carriage or motor-car, through the lovely Lombard country is far preferable to a journey in an Italian train.

The Lago d'Iseo is one of the least known of all the northern Italian lakes, and is one of the most beautiful.

The Italian Lakes

In some of its characteristics it more resembles one of the freshwater lochs of the west coast of Scotland than any other lake south of the Alps, and yet, at the same time, the Lago d'Iseo has the Italian colouring and atmosphere, and the Italian vegetation.

The Roman name of this lake was *Lacus Sabinus*, and it probably owes its present name of Iseo to the fact that at *Sebum*, a Roman town which stood on the site of the actual town of Iseo, a temple was dedicated to the sacred rites of the Egyptian Isis.

The lake is twenty-four kilometres in length, and varies in breadth from two to over five kilometres, while it reaches a depth of nearly a thousand feet. The river Oglio enters its waters close to Lovere, and flows out of them again at Sarnico at its southern extremity. Nothing can be more picturesque than the situation of Lovere, or the view from its shores. The little town, too, is one of considerable industry, both agricultural and commercial, and there are here iron foundries and ordnance works employing more than two thousand workmen.

Lovere boasts of one or two fine churches, and a small collection of paintings in the Palazzo Todini, among which are works of Tintoretto, Guercino, Gian Bellini, Giorgione, and Paris Bordone, the palace itself being a large and imposing structure.

Immediately above Lovere towers Monte Adamello with its lofty and precipitous peaks, and behind the town opens the lovely Val Camonica winding through mountains wooded to their crests, and rich pasture lands,

LAGO D' ISEO



NO. 1001
1001-1002

Bergamo and Lago d'Iseo

vineyards, and fruit orchards, and watered by the rapid and clear river Oglio. Ruined castles and secluded monasteries look down upon this peaceful valley into which tourists seldom or never penetrate, and at its head is the little town of Edolo, where there are various factories and mills worked by the force from the falls of the Oglio above it.

The Lago d'Iseo boasts of three islands, the largest of which is the Montisola, and one or two rocky islets which may be visited from the town of Iseo—an ancient walled town at present containing the remains of an old fortress—and a statue of Garibaldi.

It is rather for its peaceful solitude and for its beautiful scenery that Lago d'Iseo will linger in the memory of those who take the trouble to visit it, than for any special historical or artistic interest to be found in the small towns and villages scattered along its shores. As on the Lake of Orta, the absence of Grand Hotels, of tourists, and of all the disagreeable elements, human and otherwise, that tourists bring in their train, is very refreshing ; and it is assuredly a matter for thankfulness that spots such as the Lago d'Iseo yet remain unfrequented, and their simple, courteous population and solitary recesses yet unspoiled and unvulgarised by constant contact with foreign invaders.

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